

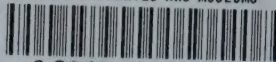
JOSEF ISRAËLS

BY
DR. MAX EISLER



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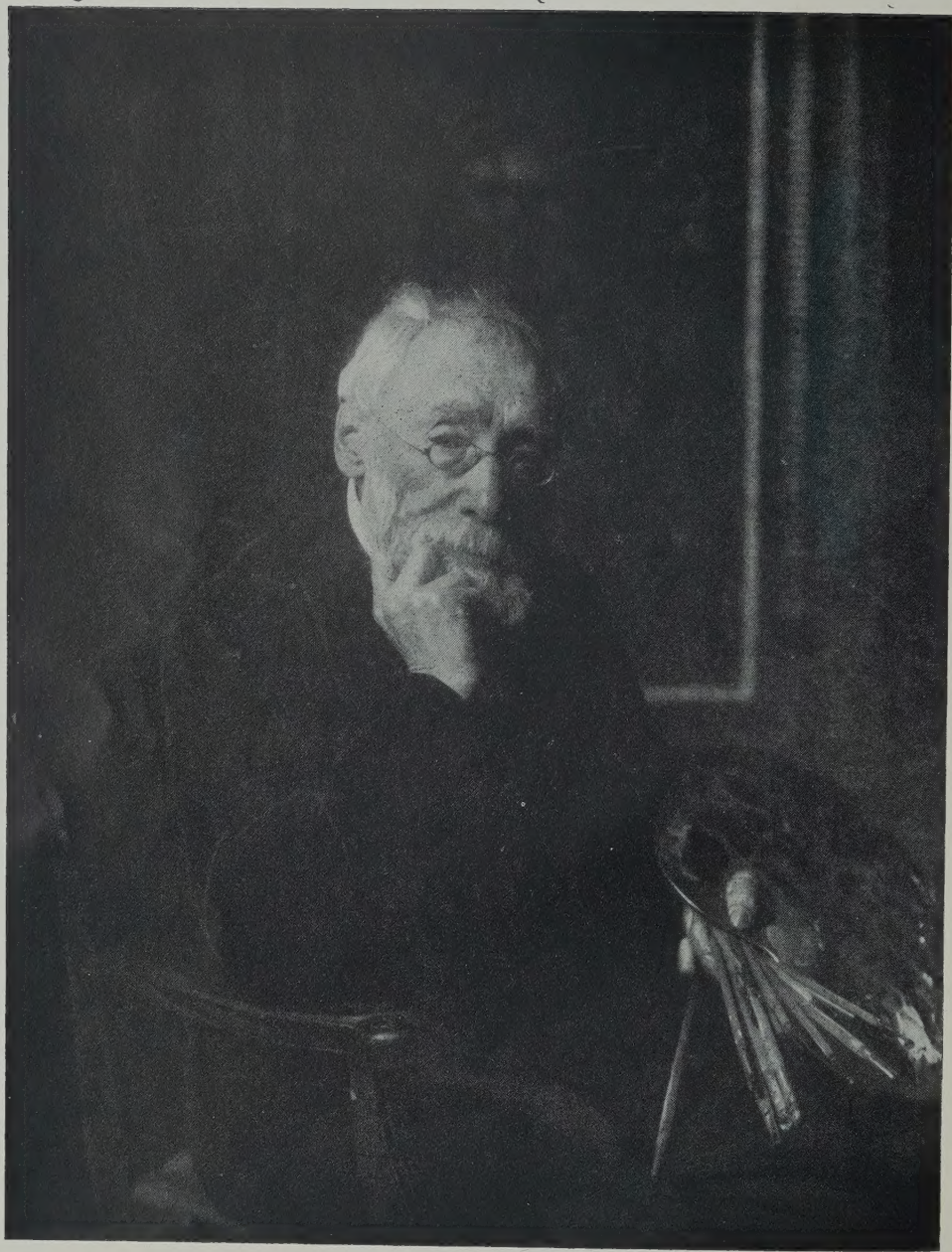


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JOSEF ISRAËLS

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JOSEF ISRAËLS AT EIGHTY YEARS OF AGE

(From a photograph)

JOSEF ISRAËLS

BY DR. MAX EISLER

PROFESSOR OF THE HISTORY OF DUTCH ART



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EDITED BY GEOFFREY HOLME

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Josef Israëls is a romanticist among realists.

In order to gain a clearer insight into this special rôle of the artist, and thereby comprehend more fully the problem presented by his art, it is necessary, first of all, to define in some degree the relationship which painting had to nature in Israëls' day. During the later development of realism the events on the continent, so dramatically crowded into a short space of time, were but a repetition of what had happened in England at the commencement of this epoch. The old Dutch masters laid the foundation : John Crome followed after Jan van Goyen in the same way as George Michel followed him later in France. Constable had, however, already broken with this worthy tradition and, in his own masterful way, had managed to remain " modern." In him was united the power of two continental generations, and he thus gave a tremendous impetus to the development in Europe : for in his paintings he is revealed as a realist, as was the master of Barbizon after him, but in his sketches he is as much an impressionist as Monet.

From these two phases of realism, anticipated slightly by Constable and more finely and richly developed by two generations of French art, there sprang a newly-awakened longing for a closer contact with nature, a more intimate sense of observation and a more clearly defined reproduction. The nineteenth century is a period of achievement : rapid progress in science and the technical studies unconsciously forces even art into service. Constable's sketches in the South Kensington Museum are, in a sense, scientific revelations : in the studies of plant life, the source of the root and the general growth are minutely described, just as the movement of the atmosphere is represented in his skies. And even the latest impressionists, the Pointillists under the leadership of Signac, do not go appreciably further ; they merely add to this method their refinement of technique.

But our problem is not so much to differentiate between these two forms of nature painting, the one an extension in the definition of material and colour, the other a development in the representation of diffused light (and it is a fortunate thing that this development of the newly discovered method of water-colour painting made such great strides in England). The main point is that art is governed by nature : she must have truth before everything, and it is for this very reason that she must in the first place have something pleasing to the eyes rather than to the soul.

However, even this " true-to-nature " art would be nothing were she not guided by the dictates of her heart in her secret longing. Citizen Thoré reminds his friend Theodore Rousseau (in the well-known and

often quoted letter) of the days spent together in their youth on the outskirts of Paris, high up in a mean attic : " Do you remember the time," he writes, " when we used to sit on the window-sill of our attic, dangling our legs over the roof and looking into a land of houses and chimney-pots, and how you used, with sparkling eyes, to liken them to mountains and flowers? Do you remember the small tree in Rothschild's garden which we could see? How every new bud on the little poplar in the springtime was an event in our lives, and how in the autumn we counted the falling leaves?" Such words of tenderest longing are echoed again in the letters of the young artist who sought freedom in the Forest of Oosterbruch just in the same way as the Englishman had struggled before him in the woods round Norwich and the Frenchman at Fontainebleau. Underlying this passion for truth is everywhere a deeper sympathy with nature, which is the attribute of a landscape painter. But with Josef Israëls this is even more apparent, for in his case, sympathy with nature is so overpowering that the truth soars into higher and more melodious spheres.

Even the Dutch artists in his own circle had attempted a rather poor sort of realism : William Roelefs had painted with his fist, so to speak, the fertile meadows of his home on the eastern side of the woods. Here also, as in England, the work was greatly facilitated by the introduction of water-colour, and thus it was that a new territory in the realm of nature study was opened up before the world. The art of the picture lies, to a very considerable extent, in the atmosphere of the subject, but there the relationship between the two ceases. The painting of the " Hague School " is quite isolated from that of the rest of Europe : love of truth predominates, but it is truth wrapped in a mantle of beauty. After the first beginnings, realism, guided and softened by the old artistic culture of the country, followed a very different trend. In the harbour pictures of one Jacob Maris, the workaday world is certainly there, but it is a silent world under the great heavenly dome, and everything is absorbed by the stillness. And as in the case of Jacob Maris, others have striven after modification of colour in the ennoblement of nature. In Bosboom's temples and churches a coppery shimmer is added ; in Mauve's dunes a dull light appears, whilst the meadows of Willem Maris reflect shining, sunny warmth, but nevertheless the fullness of colour always seems to be restricted and cramped in tone. The absolute truthfulness of nature is, however, always converted into the intimate charm or the naïve magnificence of their painting. While the impressionists in the rest of Europe were celebrating their first victory after a hard struggle, Holland still remained the happy-hunting ground of the tone artist. The " Hague School " contented itself with the splendid achievements already standing to its credit in

the field of naturalism. It remained aloof outside the general development, and was—if you like—even in its own period, “old-fashioned.” That, however, does not in the least detract from its greatness.

And it is a remarkable fact that Israëls in his turn most certainly deserted his companions, and at the same time alienated himself from the art of his day, but he effected thereby a closer link with international painting of the seventeenth century, a fact which is proved by his exceptional position. Israëls is, above all, old-fashioned, not exactly in his method of observation, but in his sense of receptivity, and therefore the greater part of his creations are not modern. This fact, however, only confirms his greatness, for his is a case of art raising itself *above* the fashion of the time, and of a single individual building up his work in the face of opposition, as it were, in accordance with his own law and character, and yet triumphing over his contemporaries. In the middle of a cold, scientific epoch, a romanticist gained the victory.

Israëls is, however, a romanticist of a new order. There is nothing in common between the manifestly overdone sentimentality of his early work and his most fully developed masterpiece, nor even those pictures of the poor, with their obviously cheap methods of attracting sympathy. He sees truth in the simple life—and also its worthiness: he depicts both. But still a third factor is to be reckoned with, for during the progress of his work, the heart of the artist is touched with a fellow-feeling, and it is this all-embracing sympathy of a large, kind heart, and the peculiar, absolutely old-fashioned romanticism of his work which attracts us all so strongly.

Whilst the interest of the painter and of the public was centred chiefly on an art which produced only happiness for the eyes, Israëls had the courage to offer a saddened but purely human type of art. In him the external sensationalism of the impressionist was opposed to the inward emotion. Man, who hitherto represented only the highest form of creation, was seen here in his most needy state, and, as a soulful being, was made the centrepiece of the work. That is a fact which has seldom been repeated in the history of classic art. And it was not without danger, especially in a time when, on the principle of “*l’art pour l’art*,” there were hard and fast laws to be followed, and kindliness was considered almost a reproach. Israëls not only possessed a large outlook upon nature, but, what was a matter of disdain among his contemporaries, he was swayed also between a desire for truth and a feeling for poetry and music. Such diversity would have led in others to banality, but with him the several qualities were united in a striking manner.

And thus we are faced with the problem of Israëls’ art: it is a border-line art, in whose workings the picturesque, the poetic and the

melodious are united upon a common basis of natural sentiment. It will, therefore, easily be understood why this painter was constantly (and not only in the days of his youth) impelled to take up his pen in order to give expression, in lyric poetry, to his overpowering feelings. He stands on the border-line which divides the arts one from another, but in him all are united. And it will also be quite intelligible why, here, all those expedients which are most apparent in the effectual making of a picture, recede, for they serve only a higher purpose—the stirring of the soul. His is, in the deepest, richest sense, a soulful art. It is because of this inward consciousness of power, that Israëls' art has, even in an epoch of mechanical progress and science, and contrary to all accepted standards of æsthetics, won real and universal renown, and for this reason it will maintain its position in the ranks of those few whose work possesses the merit of endurance.

THE ART OF JOSEF ISRAËLS

Josef Israëls—a leader of that “Hague School” which has awakened the old Dutch school of painting to new life—was born on the 27th January, 1824, in the provincial town of Groningen. His father was a Jewish small trader, very liberal-minded and such a hard reader that he could not leave his books alone even during meal-times. The boy inherited from him the restless mental ability, gravitating towards a number of varying inclinations, among them that for the making of verse. The mother, whom the son, even in late years, with his sometimes naïve way of expressing himself, has called “very lovable,” exercised a deeper influence upon his mind. She saw to his religious upbringing from an early age, and from childhood assisted him in acquiring a considerable intimacy with the Hebrew language, its euphony and its wisdom.

Young Israëls was consequently influenced by Jewish environment, predetermining his future development. It was a poor, almost needy, home in which he grew up; in the alley was a second-hand dealer’s shop, and inside, in the living room, eight hungry mouths soon crowded round the table; it was necessary to calculate and to provide, but a precious mutual kindness of heart was cultivated in the Jewish family in which the boy grew up. He further saw how relatives and friends of the family—especially in their ceremonial customs and on the occasion of the annually recurring feasts—were united together in a peculiar and characteristic world; the secret of the blood brotherhood, the fortitude under oppression of the Jewish people, struck him as solemn and fraught with meaning. Finally, the study of the Hebrew language led him into the exalted sphere of the Bible. Family, people and Bible—these were the three circles in which the boy had his being, and in these three circles, moreover, Israëls the master remained.

Added to these home influences, which formed the ground colour of the artist’s disposition, there now came the manifold impressions gained from without through the medium of the eye, which were subsequently to prove no less fruitful. Groningen was a rich city, the chief market for grain, oil seeds and tobacco, and held sway over a wide area, the economic life of which flowed together here by land and by water. Israëls, therefore, as a country-townsmen from birth, also obtained a glimpse of the simple rustic existence. From his earliest days, moreover, his life was spent in the environment of the Dutch landscape. Even over Groningen stretched the native vault of heaven, mistily veiled, alternately clouded and flooded with light; all around lay rich cornfields and mean potato patches, and in the near-by heath and moorland was that great waste which, in the later days of the artist,

was to be connected with the remembrance of driving showers of rain and to be re-incarnated in the form of powerful, cheerless landscapes. Only one thing was still lacking. But this was supplied when the young rogue, as every Groningen youngster is fond of doing, mounted the fine high tower of St. Martin's Church, and saw in the distance the North Sea.

The art of his surroundings was quite unable, however, to balance these deep influences of house and home. There was certainly to be found in the dwelling of his parents some wall-paper of animated design which appealed to the boy's love of pictures, and he was certainly able ere long to proceed, in the collections of acquaintances, to the higher spheres of the paintings of old Dutch, Italian and modern origin. More effective, as yet, however, remained the local Groningen cultivation of art, which had its leading organs in the "Minerva" School of Crafts and in the "Pictura" Union. In their prize competitions and annual exhibitions both catered for the bourgeois taste, and consequently preferred what were known at that time as "scenes of family life," a mixture by which the beholder was to be at once entertained, instructed, and, most of all, moved. The free development of the artist was thereby cramped for the first time.

His creative impulse was aroused at a remarkably early age. "Right from childhood there was in me an uncontrollable desire to depict all kinds of impossible things. I had all conceivable sorts of fantasies in my head and wanted to depict all of them." This general recollection, told to the writer by Israëls as an old man in the course of a conversation, is confirmed by a series of further accounts for which we are indebted to old newspapers, but, in particular, to Jan Veth, and to boyhood works which have been preserved. From 1831 the youngster, at that time eight years of age, trudged day after day, as soon as he was released from the elementary school, to the drawing class at the "Minerva," and here gradually climbed the educational ladder from the reproduction of a model and a plaster cast to the life school. Then, after his twelfth year, private lessons followed, the last from C. B. Buys, who could not get on with the youngster and found his method of drawing much too "slovenly." On the 10th May, 1838, the local newspaper, the *Provinciale Groninger Courant*, inserted a notice of the entries for a Municipal Technical School, among which appeared: "From J. Israëls, pupil of Mr. Buis, a drawing from the plaster cast." Such was the very modest début of a genius.

However, the boy had already made efforts on his own initiative. The conspicuous figures which attracted his attention in the intercourse under the paternal roof would not let him rest in peace. We were able to see, in 1912, at Goupil's, at The Hague, a portrait of a man from

Israëls' hand which bore the date 1837, and had consequently been painted when he was only thirteen years old. It gave no proof of talent, either in the drawing (which was, in fact, "slovenly") or in the heavy, dull colouring. It was, however, already apparent how surprisingly well the peculiarities of physiognomy had been grasped and how energetically they were portrayed. The attention of the boy had been fixed by just the most outstanding portions of the head, the nose moved awry, after the fashion of children's drawings, out of the full face view almost into profile, and the quite remarkably worked out compressed mouth. The art of expression was already discernible here.

These and similar attempts led to a decision in 1840; the sixteen-year old Israëls went to Amsterdam, in order to become a painter under the guidance of Jan Adam Kruseman. The confusion of thought and excited feelings of those days, in many ways so important, are best shown by an autobiographical passage contributed by the master to a publication on the tercentenary of the birth of Rembrandt. First of all, it must be confessed, his immature partiality was for everything "modern," that is to say, for the insipid productions of his contemporaries, but in particular the fine flesh tones, the minute detail in the depiction of costume and the pictorial *tout ensemble* in the portraits of his tutor, Kruseman. On the other hand, the national art of the seventeenth century was nothing to him. Only after he had recognised, by a somewhat lengthy period of study in the open air and in the studio and by a strenuous course of drawing from still life and from objects in motion, that the essentials in painting did not depend upon the painful methods of his days of learning, but rather on the correct assessment of the value of light and colour and the free depiction of configuration and motion of persons and objects, did he find his way into the "Treppenhuis," where, at that time, the paintings of the old masters were hung. He now passed on to copying. After a portrait by Van Dyck, a Hermit by Dou was attempted and—with still better success—a head by Van der Helst, until finally—in unavailing struggles to depict a figure from the "Syndics"—the soul of the persevering youth was quite preoccupied with Rembrandt.

Then, after this early and earnest study of the paintings of the native old masters, he again became deeply absorbed, for hours at a time—at the big green table in the friendly room where the engravings were kept—in the intimacies of the drawings and etchings of Rembrandt, in the prints "vibrating with life and soul." His emotion, which was easily moved, developed. At times he pushed the portfolio aside for a moment and placed his hand over his eyes in order to avert tears. Here, then, he found his greatest wish fulfilled, namely to render the living subject with every line full of life in a unique manner.

“ I go on turning over the leaves in the portfolio,” he writes, “ and my glance falls on the wonderful figures of the Jewish mendicants. There were hundreds of such types in Amsterdam in those days and for the artist eye of Rembrandt they must have held great attraction. One would not take them for mendicants as the hand of the master has spread over them all that radiancy and warmth with which his artist nature irradiated everything on which his eyes rested. When I got tired of looking at the exhibits, I wandered through the town and saw again the same people I knew so well from those etchings. In the Hoogstraat, in the Jodenbreestraat, where I resided some few paces from the place in which Rembrandt had worked so long, everywhere I encountered the same picturesque crowds, saw the sharply cut, grey-bearded Jews, the red-haired women, barrels full of fish, fruit, and all sorts of things, in the background the old houses, and overhead arched the blue vault of Rembrandt’s sky.”

Rembrandt and the Judengasse—these, therefore, were the first deeply influencing impressions of Amsterdam, as previously in Groningen the paternal roof and the native home. Those experiences of the boy must, however, have become buried for the time being in the depths of the mind, only to reappear at a later date and bear fruit. The hand had still for a long period to follow another almost contrary direction. Then, whilst the youth, in the centre of the industrious metropolis, was seized by a sense of social ills, and paid his solitary artistic devotions in the “ Trippenhuys,” he had a hard and tedious road of learning to follow, which now, for the second time, shackled rather than assisted the development of the inborn genius: the day was spent in a studio where the outlook was narrow, the evening in an academy at routine work.

Jan Adam Kruseman was looked up to, in his time, as an artist *par excellence*. The critics who counted admired in his courtly, or supposedly courtly, portraits, the speaking likeness, the treatment of the virtuoso, the beautiful colouring and the pleasing composition, and they also extended their praise to his occasional essays at the family life and historical type of picture—like *The Poor Widow’s Mite* and *William I., Prince of Orange, crying out at his Death: My God My God!*—which principally aimed at a vivid portrayal of emotional situations. The best productions of his earlier art appear to us to-day as paltry and cold imitations of Terborch, in addition to which the exactitude, from the point of view of draughtsmanship, of his pictures gives to his subjects a remarkable stiffness, and while the features of the persons represented are certainly faithfully portrayed, without omitting anything, character is nevertheless lacking. His later leaning towards Van Dyck was merely to his detriment; the line is flat and poor,

the colour confused and insipid. The worst part, however, was the complete lack of personality in this art, which finally dropped down to mere mechanical reproduction. Israëls was directly indebted to this tutor, apart from the introduction to the old masters, only for strict instruction in neat line work. And so it happened that he, who on his entry into the studio, while certainly showing quite unusual power and independence in the sense of colour, was still for a while behindhand in drawing, in a short time obtained the first prize at the National Academy in this very subject, namely, for a drawing from the antique.

In other respects the young Israëls, whose future almost entirely depended upon the purification and intensification of his sentiment, was not happy in his choice of a master. Jan Veth relates: "One of his (Kruseman's) pictures, representing Abraham and Isaac, had at one time aroused the liveliest admiration in the young student, particularly in respect of the manner in which a tear falling down the cheek was depicted in light, shade and reflection, and Israëls had at that time shyly asked the tutor whether he might copy the picture. . . ." "I once," so related the old master to the writer, "painted a woman, a woman who was weeping. I do not know whether I also really painted her tears, that is to say, outwardly visible tears. I know, however, that the woman in the picture *was* weeping; she was quite absorbed in weeping." The difference between these two similar subjects, the one by Kruseman and the other by Israëls, clearly shows the whole trend of the future development of our artist. Between the two methods lay the long and difficult road from the school to his own self.

In 1845 he went to Paris. Jacques Louis David having founded in Belgium an imposing branch school of historical painting, it was believed, not only here, but also in Holland, where the cooler temperament of the people and the absence of any stormy period of history no longer justified this method of working, quite generally to be the "highest style" in art and Paris to be its classical atelier. Like every painter in Holland, Israëls also became acquainted from the exhibitions with the pictures of artists such as Paul Delaroche and Horace Vernet, before he got to know these artists personally, and bestowed upon them an immoderate admiration. This was to be fateful for him, as thereby he had now again fallen into an error. For more than a decade his working powers were absorbed by historical pictures quite foreign to his natural bent.

The two poles of his student days in Paris were Ary Scheffer and François Edward Picot, that is to say: the romantic and the classic. With the art of Scheffer, the Dutchman born, who even in Paris had not become so much of a Frenchman as to abandon his inclination to almost a German sentimentality, Israëls had already become acquainted before

his departure from Amsterdam, from a picture entitled *Gretchen* exhibited there. "Le véritable peintre est un véritable poète," was said of Scheffer at that time by *Le Miroir des Arts*. His fame then stood at its zenith. It is of little importance that we find in the majority of his works to-day a line which is certainly clear but somewhat effeminate, a pale or banal colouring in feminine sentiment, a disclosure and exaggeration of sentiment making in fact a sentimental literature-painting, and, but very seldom, a simple purpose carried out simply and almost with vigour, although always with a suggestion of the lyrical. At that time Israëls saw matters in quite another light. He saw in Scheffer's *Gretchen at the Window* the full realisation of his greatest wish, namely, to portray poetic sentiment by the brush. As it was now a matter of supreme importance for Israëls to retain this sentiment, in order subsequently to transform and turn it to account in his own fashion, Ary Scheffer and, with him, the romantic represented a forward impulse in his, as yet, uncertain development.

Then once again the school had an impeding effect upon the hazy but true instinct of the young artist. This was due to Picot and his classicism. Certainly this student of David, who embellished the Louvre and Versailles with mural and ceiling paintings of a historico-mythological nature in the official style of the Bourbons, surpassed the other classicists in the warmth of his colouring and the greater naturalness of his conception. He was, however, far less a painter than a draughtsman. And this strict, almost hard method of drawing, which dominated even the diaphanous structure of the composition, contained at the same time the excellent educational value which he transmitted to the new student. Israëls had now once more to return to the plaster class—back again to Groningen and Amsterdam for the third time! "It was a strict school," he afterwards related, "I had to start again from the beginning, but I have to thank Picot for everything; it is here and not in Holland that I really learnt." He struggled through. When he arrived at the studies from the life the teacher said: "La Hollande marche bien." This was for Israëls the long awaited signal for his departure from Paris. Then, although he had absorbed at the evening classes at the Ecole des Beaux Arts, under the guidance of Vernet, Delaroche and others, much that was to continue to have a distinct influence on his future works, in spite of the fact that he found plenty at the Louvre to view, admire and copy, the town had nothing more to give him for the time being, and at that time he went on living his life as yet all unconscious of Millet and his art. In addition, he was constrained to a frugal mode of living and, in the midst of the ostentatious splendour which surrounded him, he felt depressed, lonely and homeless.

In 1847 he was again at home in Amsterdam. Here he moved into different quarters one after the other, until finally, in the year 1860, he set up his studio in the Roozengracht, to remain there for some time. Native air, home happiness! "Many a time," said he, "there was no proper dinner and I had to be content with a piece of bread and butter, not possibly because I had no money—but," he added confidentially, "I really had no money," so little were his needs and so happy-go-lucky was he at that time. At the same time he remained a really unfortunate fellow. The very first picture that he painted used up such a quantity of the particularly expensive white pigment that—although his father contributed the frame—it took him fully four years to pay off the cost of the materials. And, after all, he felt impelled subsequently, owing to adverse criticism, to paint over just this expensive white with other colours!

His path remained difficult and perplexing, his onward progress beset with toil. His ambition still followed the great ones of the day in historical painting; after Kruseman, Scheffer and Delaroche his models were now J. W. Pieneman, Decamps and Gallait. In addition to this, however, romantic emotion, the propensity of his youth, demanded its right to portrayal. Yet in the deeper recesses of his nature there was already rising a softer sentiment which urged him to return to the simplicity of nature. The conflict between these three impulses filled up the first period of the evolution of Israëls.

1848—1855.

The pathway of the historical picture, which, after biblical and mythological beginnings, later turned more and more to the materials provided by the history of his fatherland, was traversed three stages by three pictures and by a fourth the remarkable sequel was reached. The pictures in question are *Aaron* (1848), *Oldenbarneveld's last Letter* (1852) (pl. IV), *Margarete von Parma* (1855), and then *Hanna* (1860), which in reality belonged to a later period.

In the late summer of 1848 there appeared at an exhibition in Amsterdam—in addition to a portrait of the actress; *Madame Taigny*—the gigantic work, *Aaron with his sons Eleazar and Ithamar, entering the tabernacle of the congregation and finding Nadab and Abihu devoured by fire from the Lord for offering strange fire at the altar*. The leading art journal, the *Kunstchronijk*, considered that this work was certainly powerfully handled and well composed, but that it was insufficiently thought out, and that, in particular, there was something wanting in the effect of the *ensemble* for which doubtless the all-white vestments of the priests were mostly to blame. In other respects the journal recommended the young painter—with reference to the portrait, which was designated a failure—to keep rather to the his-

torical picture in future. On the other hand, the brief report in the *Tijd* passed by the historical picture in complete silence and roundly designated the colouring of the portrait as "putty." Finally, the leading newspaper vacillated between these contradictory opinions, looked on the principal work more in the light of a study and gave main prominence to the faithful rendering of the human figure. We can only judge to-day from the lithographic reproduction of E. Verveer, as all trace of the painting has been lost. It is thought to be probably somewhere in England. The reproduction shows a thoroughly conventional and impersonal style, an academic arrangement, expressionless line work and a representation of the inner emotions by means of an exaggerated depiction of facial expression and gesture.

For the next few years also—if we may place confidence in contemporary criticism, where the pictures are no longer in existence—the weakness in technique and faulty colouring remained; but the composition was firmer, without as yet being free. The influences of Scheffer, Decamps and Gallait come out at times almost directly.

The real development, however, already rested on the intrinsic merit of the pictures. And it is this which permits us to regard *Oldenbarneveld's last Letter* as a work of the transitional period. An intimate scene is given here, affairs of state yield to a family scene, the historical picture intermingles with genre-painting, and in so doing loses as much in external pathos as is gained in simple humanity. The execution has become broader, almost picturesque, the figure composition, as yet clumsy, is already dominated by a central flood of light, toned off towards the sides, an atmosphere of depression is already depicted there and in the attitude of the daughter, averted to show her grief, a leitmotif of the time of Israël's mature powers is already anticipated: the agitation of mind is portrayed merely by the demeanour—without depiction of the facial expression.

The picture which appeared in 1855, *Margarete von Parma*, signifies then in every respect the final collapse—after a period of slow decay—of the painting of historical pictures by Israël. It is small in size, the brush work has become dauby, the solid structure of the line work is wanting, the colouring lacks delicacy and is broken up by a patch of white placed coldly in the high light, and the inner action of the figures moving like marionettes shows an astonishing want of expression. The work is a document of lack of desire transformed into lack of capacity. Then, the painter having refreshed himself at the springs of romance and already turned to the natural, historical stuff became strange to him, and when a stranger visited him at his studio and wished him to paint a picture with the subject *Hanna*, he replied in

surprise: "Well, this can really hardly be asked of me to-day; this will be a very difficult matter for me." The picture came into being—but the problem was solved in a new manner, on the lines of his forward evolution. A woman, holding her child before her, kneels before the invisible God. It is a woman of whom it is said in the Holy Scriptures that she silently prayed. The invisible and the silent, consequently the inner religious state of feeling were portrayed here. The critics, who had nothing better to say in praise of the young painter of the historical at the beginning of his career, than that he did not find enough in the lower but sought the higher, that is to say that he strove to rise, even in "historical" spheres, now said of *Hanna*: "Israëls' *Hanna* arouses sacred feelings, being a departure from every form of tradition and simply human." And then followed this passage, which is worthy of thought: "All the laboured, conventional affections of a sacred and high-historical art no longer move us. Equally little will an anecdotal interpretation of history remain in fashion. We wish only to see real character and soul." The critics did not know that it was the progressive work of Israëls which had effected the thorough transformation of their criticism, and this work had at the same time, by its own evolution, on the whole crushed the Dutch school of historical painting. It therefore already showed its deep-rooted significance.

Later, when the historic trend had replaced the romantic in Israëls' creations, the year 1850 marked its breaking through. It was a breaking through in every sense. With his *Meditation* (pl. III), followed in the next year by his *Adagio con espressione*, the artist achieved not only his first unbounded success, but also for the first time gave clear expression to the racial influences which affected him. The historical picture had become hampering ballast; the romantic was the real granary of his vigorous work. It showed above all that each step in his evolution depended less on the change of the field of subject matter than on the freeing of his own sentiment, and, more remotely, on toning down and intensification.

The two pictures, one of which portrays a maiden reposing in reverie in the shade of a wood, whilst the other depicts the composer Weber who, on his deathbed, turns to his instrument, exercised on his contemporaries a truly profound effect. His *Meditation* was praised for its combination of tenderness and vigour, the softly streaming play of light and the gentle melancholy. People vied with each other in words of the highest praise, until the cold prose of the Dutch language no longer sufficed and the aid of verse was sought to express the deep mystic effect produced. The national pride kindled at these two works, and took, for the first time, a resolute stand against the sufficiently long over-estimated foreign art and took enthusiastic posses-

sion of the young master. In short, people saw in one picture poetry, and in the other music, depicted by the art of the painter. This was, however, notoriously exaggerated, but it had a real material core. In truth, in both cases, the technique was feeble or careless, the imagination—in comparison with Scheffer's *Maiden in the Wood* and *Weber's last Song*, by De Keyser—lacked originality, and the sentiment, of the second picture at any rate, was plainly influenced by his first visit just paid to Düsseldorf. He drew on a whole series of external attributes to portray the psychical state of man and maiden, and everywhere was to be noted the intent to produce the utmost effect. However, the rich enigmatical sentiment was already there, centred in Man, as a lonely human being, and in that lay the real value of both works, foreshadowing future development. Indeed, his arrival at maturity was now a question of painting poetry *without* woodland shadows, music *without* 'cello, and of comprehending the finer shades of feeling.

Less conspicuous and, for this reason, also less noticed, there ran—for a while parallel with the historic and romantic trend of his early work—a third direction of working in which the artist devoted himself to mankind in its natural state and simple incidents of life. Biographical events had prepared him: his origin as a native of the provincial town Groningen, his removal from the Ghetto in Amsterdam, which always appeared to him in a half mystic light, into the actual quarter of the seaport bustle, two excursions from Paris to Barbizon, where he depicted the first time (about 1847) peasant houses, the second time (1853) rustic interiors, between this, short stays for change of air in his native Oosterbeek, the birthplace of a new Dutch landscape art, and in the park district of Roosendaal—all this and more had already familiarised him with nature. Moreover, the natural had already been given expression in his works, first of all in the portraits and in kindred studies: to these belong the *Portrait of a man* of 1837, further a *Groningen Jew*, who is selling pipe-bowl lids, the *Portraits of his parents*, about 1846, the double portrait of *Professor Pick and wife* and *Madame Taigny*, both 1848, and finally that *Portrait of Eleazar Herschel* (pl. II), strongly standing out from the chiaroscuro which, as a complete type already closely approaches that ideal which Israëls was apt to designate by the words: "It is it."

The stepping-stone towards the new and individualistic Israëls is formed by the free scenes of simple life. Of these, however, apart from some titles of pictures, which at any rate are reminiscent in motif of his later work—e.g. *Mother and Child*, *Stripped and turned out* (both 1846), *A Boy Fishing* (1850), and, again, *Mother and Child* (1852)—we possess for the most part only chance contemporary criticism, which is mainly of a disparaging nature. In the last men-

tioned picture, the charm of the colouring and the transparency of the flesh tints were certainly praised, but the "poverty of conception" was deprecated. This is scarcely a matter for surprise as it was only to be expected that criticism, which had only just been withdrawn with difficulty from the network of historical illusions, then plunged head first into the bath of romanticism, should now thoroughly misunderstand just that trend by which Israëls was to give new life to Dutch painting and acquire for himself the name of master.

For Israëls, however, there was no longer any conflict between the three trends of his early work after this year, 1852: the year before *Adagio*, and now *Oldenbarneveld's Last Letter* appeared—the heterogeneity of subject matter was already treated in *one* closely related spirit, actuated, for the time being, by romanticism. The tendency of his future development had already become clearly established: its outcome was to be natural life.

1855-1860.

In the year 1855 Israëls went to Zandvoort to recover his health after an illness, this place at that time still being a poor fishing village on the North Sea. He stayed at the house of a carpenter, saw simple folk around him, in their daily work and in the living room; and outside, the dunes, the sea and the sky. He would then have been well on the way towards reaching his goal by other paths, but the new surroundings of nature hastened the process and brought that impulse of energy which the irresolute man of thirty still required. He now noted in his sketch-book the most unpretentious objects: a cupboard with peasant's utensils, a plate-shelf, an old clock, stoves, waggons, scythes, chaff-cutters, kitchen pans, cooking-ladles, saws and bedsteads. He was already accumulating the material for his future pictures of humble interiors. There are also included motifs which were subsequently to become paintings, such as the woman with the dog-cart, proceeding with tired and heavy steps across the countryside, or the woman with the shawl, sitting beside a boy on a basket and gazing over the sea. However, these direct observations, simply depicted by the crayon, were not, for some considerable time to come, to be worked up by the painter in his usual effective manner and with all his wonted sentiment. His eye was refreshed and rejuvenated, but the artist could not shake off the old methods of working with such rapidity and also the old spirit still held sway over his work.

The stay at Zandvoort does not indicate any sudden break. Even after this, between slow and hesitating steps forward, there are a number of lapses still plainly to be discerned. Three years after Zandvoort there appeared the paintings *Passing Mother's Grave* (pl. VI), the *Wandering Musician* and *After the Storm* (pl. V), three works which are

much nearer his early work than that of his time of maturity. The group, with the fisherman returned from a long voyage, which passes by *Mother's Grave* has still the heavy dramatic touch of the historical pictures, the *Wandering Musician* still the romantic melancholy, whilst *After the Storm* combines these two older trends of working into one interior, depicted with much detail—naturally not so solid in composition and softer in sentiment. Of the last mentioned picture a portion was to be seen in 1911 in the Hague Art Union "*Pulchri Studio*," which shows only the maiden on the threshold, gazing at the disturbed sea, consequently seizing upon a leitmotif of the future, *i.e.* that of the resigned woman who calmly waits. These three works had, however, already some characteristics in common, which pointed to the future style, for in each of the three cases there appeared a family, moved to their inmost depths by *one* cause, toned down from immoderate effect by the depiction of the varying demeanour and gestures of the adults down to the instinctive emotions of a child's mind. Indeed, this further occurred in quite a schematic manner.

Above all, however, the artist's way of looking at nature had become changed at Zandvoort. Under the influence of the natural conditions of light, the painting had suddenly become light in tone. Inside the dry colouring, treated almost in a hard manner, appears a whitish cold blue and a brick-like or brighter red, always, however, dull, as the chief accentuation. The drawing still fluctuated between a conventional smoothness and a crude, rigid modelling, whereby not seldom an individual subject is depicted in a clumsy manner. However, precisely in this conflict of the more mature conception with the still backward and faulty technique, lies the commencement of Israëls' new and individualistic art.

This, indeed, did not escape the notice of contemporary critics. In the first work after the stay at Zandvoort, by which the artist had taken possession of the field of his future by the depiction of the simple life of the fishermen, in the picture exhibited in Rotterdam in 1856, *First Love*, they already admired the fine natural colouring and the bright reflected light in which the maiden at the window, her back towards the light, was placed, and also the genuine awkward attitude of the young suitor. The portraiture and execution now approached—as also in previous years—that trend towards the natural, which subsequently came ever more strongly to the fore in pictures of shore life. In 1858 appeared *Ida, the fishermaid before the door* and *The Cradle*; in 1859, under the old name of *Reverie*, a perfectly new work, most clearly marking the swing of the pendulum, no longer the romantic loneliness of the sylvan glade but the maiden sewing in the dunes, and finally, in 1860, *Geertemoei*, the needy fishwife, no

longer carrying on any visible occupation. With these and similar works, which subsequently followed one another in quick succession, the general view of critics and public also altered. It was now said : " It is something ideal, something higher, something—heavenly (if the adjective is permissible) in the portrayal of the real, the existing, the actual on this earth." And, finally, the new word for this new art was found : " *Naïveté*."

Now, therefore, was the promise of Zandvoort realised. However, in order, after so much preparatory work, to acquire the tranquillity of mind and fullness of heart from which his mature work really sprang, he still wanted something. And this want was filled in the year 1863, Israël's in this year leading a bride into his house ; he obtained a mate and a home. That was the one great event of his later life, determining and explaining everything.

The period of Israël's mature work lasted nearly fifty years. The overripe crop cannot be harvested in our essay, even approximately. We must rest content with indicating in general the evolution of his art in the long sketch of time of its perfection, and with more sharply defining its character in some selected instances.

The characteristic of his art is its soul. It is no adventurous soul, taking all by storm in supernatural flights of fantasy, but a shy, gently disposed and human soul, and consequently the nature and effect of his work is not sensuously pleasing and spiritually elevating, but only restful and only human.

It follows that all further development depends upon the refining and the intensification of this soul. The departure from his early work and the coming into his own lies at the point where romantic passion retired and a cautious groping perception left the field free. It remains food for thought that in this case an artist had to attain the full age of man before his peculiar and more gentle instinct was stirred and called into being.

In place of the historic or visionary bloodless creations, we now have simple, laborious beings : peasants, fishermen and Jews ; instead of the gorgeous and ostentatious scenes we have the quiet living-room, the desolate duneland and the foaming seacoasts—all of them in dim lights. For it is in half-light that this art comes to fruition.

In the faint shadow cast by the setting sun into the room, in the heavy mist of the shores, the line work loses its former harshness, the colouring its often faulty clarity : all resolves itself into tone. In place of the sterile draughtsmanship, enters a picturesque breadth which tolerates nothing solid, nothing tangible, but only the undefined, the suggested. The structure seems to be floating, the figures lose their plastic appearance, only the demeanour remains. It passes through

all degrees from the intimate to the monumental, but always homely and based on sincerity, less apparent to the eye than to the feelings. In such manner do the, to use an expression of the master, "living and being pictures" come into existence, but this "living and being" embraces not only the figures, but the whole of their surroundings, in which demeanour, air and light tunefully blend and fade away into soft metallic, mostly silvery, or fresh earthy tones.

Always in the first place—from the dauby dingy colours—there is an unpleasing impression to the eye, always finally a pure soothing melody, a hidden song, mostly in a minor key.

This spirit of melody in the works of Israëls, that is to say, the imponderable, which determines the effect, has, however, motives, paths and phenomena which can be indicated to some degree. It takes its root in the easily excitable, lyrically moved, Jewish blood, and in the Groningen experiences of the boy, received into his inmost depths and buried there for a long time, but now again emerging, particularly in the events relating to family, house and home. The man then shook himself free from the ballast of the school, dropping the epic subjects step by step and only retaining so much as they held of sentiment. The central point of this sentiment is, in the first place, the artist himself, then the natural folk, taken from life, which he now portrayed in unspeakably diversified, finely discriminated, and mostly melancholy conditions of mind. This melancholy ground colouring, however, is not the salient point, but the circumstance that the most extreme sentiments—sunny humour and lonely grief—balance themselves in a happy mean. Even tragic shock now yields to resignation, gloomily brooding in the case of the men, patient in the case of the women. In addition, there is, in every individual case, a clear pointer to social conditions and the common lot of man. And this expedition into portrayal on broad and general lines was now further supported by the undefined atmosphere of the visionary world which flows out over the frame of the picture. This does not apply to the landscapes only. A good number also of Israëls' pictures of room interiors are not exhausted in the narrow and cosy sections depicted, but form from dying lights and immensely growing shadows those indefinite, unending expanses which—outside and in—are nothing other than the expanses of an ardent, roving human soul.

His period of maturity had now arrived—hardly consciously and for a time overlapping—in parallel lines of motif, the roots of which in many cases ran back to former times, particularly the years following upon Zandvoort. These leitmotives are : the motif of death and lonely age, that of the playing children and the knitting maiden, that of young love, of expectation and motherhood, that of the family and the sitting-

room, that of the return home and the homeless, that of labour and the Jews, finally landscapes and portraiture. In each of these lines, this art first of all throws off the old load of external dramatic effect and symbolism, only progressively to simplify and soften itself and to become deeper. Each line consequently presents an approximate picture of the evolution of the other work also.

We will select, as it brings us back most directly to our previous delineation of the period most fraught with meaning, the motif of death. It commences with the work entitled *The Shipwrecked Mariner* (pl. IX) which—exhibited in Paris in 1861 and in London in 1862—brought the artist the first, and since then lasting, recognition in the countries of the West, which very quickly included America. (It is to-day in the *National Gallery* in London.) The lifeless body of a shipwrecked person is taken up from the shore. We still have the striking dramatic action, with its sufficiently known weaknesses. Jan Veth has found the influence of Raphael in the composition, the structure is almost disjointed, owing to the two groups of escorts, and the foremost one shows relationship to the picture, *Passing Mother's Grave* (pl. VI), the composition of which is reflected here. The line work is dull and confines itself to the outline, the pigment is viscous, the colouring dull and in places heavy. It was, however, already dominated and regulated by masses of light and shade—for the time being laboriously set out—and the feeling is already there that the sea and its folk are welded together after the storm into *one* depressing impression.

In a milder form, and still as a genre picture, the same motif appears in the *Day before the Funeral* (pl. X) (exhibited in Rotterdam in 1862). In the foreground, in the bare room sits a woman with her little daughter and in the shadowy background lies the dead, under a black cloth. Everything, however, still shows too much design for effect, and in the withered branch on the floor the leaning to symbolism is also still there. The chiaroscuro, however, already has greater smoothness and the group already shows the melancholy but inspiring drawing of the hand of Israëls, the contrasts between mother and daughter are almost instinctive and the features—covered or averted—have already become parts of the general demeanour.

Nearly half a generation later the master, now quite matured, again took up the theme of this picture, and this twice in succession. The two works, which appeared in 1878, bear the same title: *Alone in the World*. Both are, above all, wonders of light effects.

The first (pl. XLIII) (in the National Museum at Amsterdam) is already in size intimate and concentrated. At the bedside of her dead husband sits a dear old woman weeping. From the window on the left

comes a bluish silver light, appearing first like a vapour in the room, then becoming fuller and wider, and, finally, being swallowed up in the gloomy shadows by the door. In its passage it picks up the poor household articles—the table and the tin can, the chest and the Dutch clock—carries with it the brown, grey and green colours, absorbs the articles lying nearest to its passage, dissolves into the more distant and only throws the enshadowed objects into relief to a certain extent. The white colour accumulated the light. This white lies on the shroud of the dead body and the hood of the widow. The light is, therefore, not only a chief means for the artistic effect, but it knows the course of the soul, and, therefore, spins its web just in those places, and as it falls upon the bowed, inwardly grieving woman, there emerges from its tender veil not merely some sort of, but *the* attitude of womanly lament for the dead. This is the stage at which Israëls—in contradistinction to the lady with the tear-drops of his tutor Kruseman—realised his own ideal: to paint a woman weeping bitterly—without visible tears. Moreover, the room weeps at the same time, the light hovers consolingly over all, and the dull silver tone sings a hidden song of reconciliation and peace.

The second picture (pl. XLIV) (in the Mesdag Museum at The Hague), is sequel to this mourning for death with a masculine subject. A man sits, this time viewed from the front, beside the couch of his dead helpmeet. The low section of the room, emphasising the length of the recumbent body, heightens the feeling of depression, the cap of the man which has fallen to the floor in the act of his prostrating himself, the clumsy hands holding his knees, and the reposing arms of the dead woman, expressive of lassitude even in death, and the inconsolable heaviness of the bereaved man, the vertical window shutter which keeps the light from the somewhat inclined head of the dead woman, as if it still had to be protected from its rays and, finally this light, which, in a bronze tone, blends with the fine grey of the atmosphere of the chamber, falling with more powerful effect on the figure of the man and unspeakably tenderly and melting on the figure of the woman, on whose shroud it fades and dies away—all these are wondrous gifts of the inmost sense of feeling of the master. Originally—so Veth relates—the man had a wreath in his hand and a hat of mourning on his head. Then one after the other they were got rid of. This art no longer needs the attributes of narrative, action and pathos; it now found sufficient in simple dignity of feeling, in command of sentiment, in which the sympathy of the artist mind flowed, purified and ennobled.

The fate of the lonely was taken from various other series of motifs, and pursued in a more sober manner, ever approaching more closely to the calm nature of the master. From the series of works depicting lonely old age, there emerge the *Comrades* (pl. XLI)—the dumb,

silent intercourse of a grey-haired old shepherd with his dog—and *When one is Old* (pl. XLVI)—the almost monumental picture of a village hag, crouching before the fireside and warming her hands. Then come the many pictures of the homeless, trudging along under sullen skies through the unending dunes and moorland. Finally we have the motif of the waiting woman, sitting at the window or at her door, gazing out over the misty sea, including the picture entitled *A Gaze into the Distance* (in the National Museum at Amsterdam), which encloses the mother and child in *one* big outline, in *one* body and *one* attitude, and the *Woman in front of the Window* (in the Boysmans Museum at Rotterdam), of which mention will be made later.

However, the finest and most individualistic work of Israëls is not to be sought for in these sorrowful and dark pictures of loneliness, not in their antithesis, the scenes of child life in happy vein, showing us the little ones and tiniest tots engaged in sailing their little ships in the pools left by the receding tide, in teasing the domestic cat, at the cooking of the pancakes, at meals or helping mother, but in the happy mean between these contrasts; in the meditative reveries of the living-room. On the road thither we have the pictures—most of which are to be seen to-day in the National Museum at Amsterdam—with the still always tragically burdened mother, holding a child in her ample lap, one hand on its body while the other, for instance, reaches for the platter of steaming pap, the tired face, lost in thought, gazing into space. Then we have the other more peaceful works, where a woman sits at the table in the midst of her tribe of children, the youngest sleeping on her almost benumbed arm, whilst the other hand plies the sewing needle with tender care. To this, moreover, belong the pictures, painted at varying times, of a maiden knitting, where a conception of still life painting asserts itself and under the friendly beams of the spring sunshine, the colours glow more brightly, the flesh tint becomes more transparent and the skin seems to exhale fragrance. However, even this is still in some degree genre painting in its treatment.

The exact mean, however, is to be found in the interiors, due only to the rushing, bubbling, singing light, the soul of his inspiration. Then the room itself takes up the story; it becomes spacious, the abode of dim atmospheres, of tone values and moods of all degrees absorbing even the inmates into itself. This occurs in the series of pictures of old women at the fireside or the spinning-wheel, where mighty shadows try to swallow up and drive out the few patches of light; it happens in the case of the various gatherings round the hearth where the firelight and the late sun, the smoke of wood, the steam from the kettle and the atmosphere of the room blend softly together. And, finally, this occurs in that boundless series of interiors where, in the light of the dying day,

women sit at the wicker cradle, sewing or even unoccupied, where everything tarries dreamily, listening to the hidden song of the room, which is the hidden song of the soul of Israëls. Mirth and melancholy meet here in peace, reconciled one with the other.

This home feeling, in the inspiring force of which there gradually becomes no distinction between family and room, between living beings and inanimate things, is the common link between the various manifestations of the artist. Of surrounding objects he likes best the nearest. He had travelled far in the meantime, had visited Spain and Morocco and, finally, even Venice, but even outside his home country he remained Dutch. He brought home from Tangiers, as the main fruit of his visit, which he has described in a book worth reading, "*Spain*" (1899), vividly depicting his manner of observation, a single sheet, which later ripened into a picture, the study of that *Writer of the Law*, the model for which he could just as well have taken from the Amsterdam Ghetto; and from Venice that remarkable water-colour, which shows the panorama on the Grand Canal, on both sides of the Doge's palace, veiled in a thickly rising mist: to the Dutchman the southern magic of colour was doubtless never held in respect! However, in his own homeland, which he ranged within a narrow circle on the coast and in the villages of the interior, ever in search of fresh subjects, he made a distinction. It is not a difficult matter to understand that, with amiable exaggeration, he held up the beauty of the Dutch landscape, against all other, but the fact that he held up *his* portion of coast against all others in his home country is only to be explained by the peculiar intensity of his home feeling.

Remarkably enough he painted these shores mostly at an advanced age, and furthermore, as they appeared under the lash of storms and in autumnal weather—accordingly just as he has described the forceful character of the North Sea in words also, in "*A Walk to Scheveningen*" (1905). Sullen the sea, with its surging billows breaking into foam and in the showers of rain the labouring horses and fishermen, one with elementary nature. On the other hand, the barren dunes and the endless moorland acted as assisting factors in his attacks of despondency. At intervals, which did not, however, often recur, his eye lingered a moment even out there on secluded scenes; for instance, a half shady nook by a country cottage, and introduced into these scenes also the familiar somnolescent atmosphere of his pictures of interiors.

Then we have the portraits, objective and forceful—both naturally, only in so far as this perceptive art was possible at all. They point to a pronouncedly impressionistic style. After the smooth chiaroscuro of *Eleazar Herschel* (1846; in the Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam), after the warm floating chiaroscuro of *Mr. Helweg* (1860; in the National

Museum), the natural atmosphere breaks through in the later works, with the aid of a broad, flowing brush, and allows a portion of the head, on which the stronger light falls, to stand out from the dense veil of the background. The mere studies, with their hasty stroke of the brush, their coarse modelling and their hues of damp earth determine practically all further treatment. In the case of the female portraits the type and the race predominate. Of the series of these representations, there stands out as a special masterpiece the female bust in the Drucker Collection in Amsterdam, *In Melancholy Mood* (pl. LVIII). A greyish blue haze, which rises and falls, dissolves into thin air and again thickens, and by this means alone brings forth the figure from within its faintly gleaming space. And yet the sense of touch arrives here at its full grateful expression. The body is tangibly formed throughout, the head perceptibly rests on the hand, the flesh gleams and breathes—it is a synthesis of boundless enigmatical richness. The same process applies in regard to the male portraits. The representations are almost always of men in close touch with the artist, including some of great talent, for instance the actor *Veltman* (National Museum, Amsterdam), the artist *Roelofs* (Municipal Museum, The Hague), the musician *De Jong* and the *Privy Councillor Oppenheim* (both in private possession at The Hague). It is consequently just here that we expect to see direct evidence of intellectual or social contact with the artist. Strange to say, however, any such evidence is lacking. In this case also Israëls gives a clear berth to psychological analysis and contents himself with the more physical side. He rather presents the animal in the persons, his portraits remaining almost indifferent from a spiritual point of view.

In this cloudy, almost chaotic state of affairs, any fine and real alteration is only brought about in his portraits of self. Israëls did not portray himself too frequently, but rather more often in his later years, and then in all styles of technical execution. In most cases the broad brimmed hat is shading the forehead with the thin temples, the struggle with the light only beginning in the deep eye sockets and finally getting full play on the shaggy beard which also covers the mouth. The eyes are mostly depicted under the glasses, strained in observation, and very seldom at rest. The last doors to the soul remain closed and we are deprived of a glance therein. However, the graphic sheets are already character studies and the paintings are impressions of moods. The most important of them hangs in the National Museum at Amsterdam. On a grey ground, the brown of the velvet coat, the white of the shirt collar, the silver of the hair under the black hat and, in the midst, the gold glimmer of the spectacles. With an unusually wide brush a warm-toned flowing atmosphere is obtained here, a floating effect without weight and an intrinsic eloquence of the chiaroscuro which, within the

sphere of Israëls' portraiture is somewhat extraordinary and forms the bridge to the most important examples of his free compositions.

The surprisingly few pictures of Jews are also objectively seen. He not only delineates them well in their physical aspect, but also gives vivid representations of their ancient customs, their appearance, strange to the life about them, and their symbolic existence, in short, their air of oppression, secretly imbued, however, with the dignity of the fate of a thousand years. We do not mean by this the exceptional work, *The Law Writer*, warmly stirred by remembrances of eye and the heart, the sketch of which was made on the occasion of the meeting of Israëls with a Thora writer under the glowing skies of Tangiers, when in the heavily shadowed attic, by the medium of the Hebrew language, first mouth answered mouth and then blood responded to blood, to which was added the spell of the faith (the fine impressionist pencil sketch in the book "Spain," the picture directly imbued with the feeling of the master, 1912, at Goupil's at The Hague.) We mean pictures of the description of *A Son of the Ancient Race* (pl. LXVII) and *The Jewish Wedding* (pl. LVII) (Stedelijk Museum and National Museum, Amsterdam). Here again, Israëls remains objective. He represses his sympathy and paints directly like a realist—certainly, indeed, the instinctive way of living of this Jewish circle. And he attains now, in his old age, by both of these, that remarkably fresh and powerful style of expression by which he approaches so nearly to the later works of Rembrandt.

In other respects, however, it is precisely these pictures of Jews which show the difference between the two masters of chiaroscuro. The same Israëls, who let his Jewish blood stream into the atmospheric deep marvels of light of his Dutch subjects, here becomes harsh, almost parsimonious and suppresses—from modesty and hesitation—the melody of the sympathetic soul. From modesty, being himself a son of this people, and from hesitation, because he wishes to avoid that tendency. For this reason the subjective characteristic of his other art is diminished precisely in these works and it is just this which distinguishes them from the pictures of Jews by Rembrandt, those marvellous works of a fellow feeling stirred. This contrast prevails even in the works depicting Jewish history; one has only to compare the cold, drear sentiment in Israëls' *David and Saul* (pl. LX), in the Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam), with the heart-gripping, highly affecting sentiment in the picture of the same name by Rembrandt (in the Mauritshuis, The Hague). But, in addition, the soulful beauty and the truly princely fantasy, with which the old Dutch master endows even the Jewish beggars, are absent here and elsewhere in the case of the grandchild. They are to be found only in the intimate, in the touching,

in the human. In this case, however, the homely song is there, the voice of Israëls, but Rembrandt's voice carries further, reaches higher, right up to a hymn.

It is in the human element that the art of Israëls is in contact with that of Millet. " Him it is we have to thank for commonplace humanity being placed on the throne which it has a right to claim, for the history of conquerors, of holy and celebrated men not forming the only subject from which a great master might take his inspiration, but that the labourer ploughing the land, the mother feeding her suckling babe, might have the same loving care bestowed upon them and be acknowledged to have an equally good claim to beauty as any object of creation which surrounds us." The words of Israëls concerning Millet sound like a reminiscence of the errors and struggles of his own youth and like an unconscious appreciation of his own period of maturity. The differences in the art of the two masters, however, are still considerable. They appear, as regards form, from a comparison of Millet's *Woman on the Sea-shore* (Mesdag Museum, The Hague), which appears to derive its monumental harmony from the Erythrean sibyl of Michael Angelo, and the *Woman at the Window* of Israëls, to be similar in mien but independent of both works. No less significant, in the case of both masters, is the contrast of the internal workings of the mind, which manifests itself in the clearest manner in the motif of prayer: one, the *Angelus* (in The Louvre at Paris), is executed in the open field, the other in a room, *Dinner-time in a Country Cottage at Delden* (pl. XLII) (Dordrecht Museum). Millet is above all a rhythmically framed draughtsman, an intuitive artist, in the case of whom everything, even the sentiment, comes straight from mother earth, with the nature and work of which he, the peasant's son, remains indissolubly connected. Israëls, however, is a painter and a melodious soul; in his case everything emanates from mankind only.

But without a knowledge of his activities as a draughtsman, the method and development of Israëls' painting is neither fully intelligible nor correctly to be estimated, for Israëls is not only eminent draughtsman, etcher and aquarellist, but this side of his work is a most decisive factor in the shaping of the other.

Also his sojourn in Zandvoort is significant as being a turning point in the life of the draughtsman. His work before that time is for the major part classically smooth and inadequate, the lines do not " grip " the living individuality, but idealise it by generalising the surroundings, so that the effect does not give character, but assumes merely a sort of calligraphic appearance. From that time onward, however, his drawing is inclined to be more intimate, and this manifests itself already in the subjects chosen, in the little workaday things in the peasant dwelling,

in the sitting-room, in the workshop and in the courtyard. After he had passed through various schools, the gift of direct observation which the boy had already evinced in a surprising degree in his early but clumsy attempts, had for some time tended to deteriorate, or had been diverted to "higher aims," but the gift now becomes more clearly discernible and is never again lost. It is indeed conspicuous in still life studies, and is advanced in the incidental details of genre: thus, after lying dormant for some time, it is quickened into a state of activity. In this respect, much may be learnt from a page of his sketch book at Zandvoort, which was published by Jan Veit in the journal *L'Art flamand et hollandais*. In the foreground a little girl is depicted in a quite natural pose of baby-like pride: the dainty little bonnet is illustrated in detail. In the background is a hastily chalked sketch (which is later to be converted into an oil painting): the first steps of a child tottering between the upright form of its mother and the crouching figure of the father, completes a scene in the courtyard. The uncertain restless lines have no power of expression in themselves, but are merely an indication of the definite life-like formation of the whole. It must be admitted, however, that in the accompanying studies of the father's stoop, there are still signs of a struggle between an academic manner and the new method of conveying an idea, without the latter gaining the preponderance. And for many years after that, the same undecided conflict is noticeable in the drawing of pictures of large dimensions and of heroic sentiments. But as was only to be expected, the new method attained to maturity in a natural way.

The sketches in "Spain"—the book of travel already mentioned—throw an important light upon the pre-eminence of Israël's as a master draughtsman. They are, throughout, impressionist, a word which is clothed, however, by the artist with a new significance. One expected to find, under his handling of the chalk, that light and shade would be imbued with a wonderful, fascinating and secretive atmosphere. And here mention must be made of the *Hall of the Alhambra*, in which the old pillared vestibule is quite filled with the veneration and religious sentiment of a wandering Jew. And then again, the old man writing beneath the evening lamp, perhaps the most intimate, and certainly the most comfortable scene drawn by the artist—a document from his own biography. And it will not be surprising to find that, in the definite line studies—as, for example, that for the bride in the *Jewish Wedding*, and his own portrait (sketched out with a feverish pen) all degrees of the artist's powers of observation are in evidence, from the merest glance to the closest scrutiny, and it is as well that in this collection of scenes from peasant and fisher-folk life, we have examples of his magnificent portrayal of figure. These sketches enrich more than

anything else our picture of the master. For when the dim mantle of paint is thrown aside, it is clear that Israëls is in every sense of the word a figure-painter. Even in sketchy drawings, nature assumed under his hand monumental proportions, and it is upon such a foundation that the whole of his art is constructed.

It is a remarkable fact that Israëls' etchings (collected and published by H. J. Hubert in 1909) exhibit few of the broadly decorative qualities characteristic of the engraver's art. Instead (and herein lies their especial charm), they appear rather to take on the nature of a pen sketch, and later of a chalk drawing. In the first named category appears that warm and fragrant sketch, *Girl leaning on a spade* (1875), and in the latter we must place that masterpiece, the *Old Man* (1898) (pl. LXXVII), who, apparently blind, is leaning against a dimly outlined wall, feeling his way with his stick on the ground and dragging his foot painfully after him. Even where the sketches do not form an actual study for a painting, they have all the appearance of being one. The smell of the earth, the atmosphere of the home, love of children and a great sympathy for the worker and for lonely old age after the working day is over—all are expressed in these pieces. They nevertheless stand alone, on account of their somewhat harsh and transparent method, in the works of the master.

But of far greater significance in Israëls' style, are his numerous water-colour drawings. Even if the motif is not worked up later into an oil painting, or is not supplemental to it, there are a large number of water-colours generously scattered among the master's collection of oil paintings. For, in this form of technique, which demands speedy treatment, the hand acquires, from the very beginning, that lightness of touch which is useful also for oils, and which lends an undefined freedom to the expression of the conception. When once maturity is reached, water-colour and oil painting outvie each other, and since the master had overcome all the material difficulties in the two colour methods, he controlled both and was able with either to attain the same result. This, however, only concerns that especial group of water-colours which through the medium of tone, bring to perfection the expression of a certain sensibility. To this group belongs the *Young Seamstress*, wrapped in an atmosphere of soft light, the girls and women in the dunes surrounded by autumnal shades, and the angler, enveloped in a damp brown-green web: all these and many other lightly touched sketches might be added. It is astounding to realise from such examples to what heights the artist has attained in making melody on such a harsh instrument as coloured paper.

But his water-colour art plays an important rôle: it might well be said here, that the aim of a work in oils is tone, whilst that of a water-

colour is colour. A representative collection of his water-colours will yield a mass of bright hues, but it would almost appear as if, when the wet spot is soaked up by the paper underneath, the master desired to re-distribute the material on his palette. His intention in this respect can be followed in the scheme of violet tones which recur so often in the theme of the pig-sty and also in the sickroom, bringing them gradually from muddiness into fragrance. His colouring is remarkably bright in the *Cobbler at his meal* (in the Rijksmuseum at Amsterdam), which might almost be taken for an early Max Liebermann. An ever-increasing realism is manifested here, and this applies, in a very large degree, to the *Toddler* (pl. LXVIII) (in the same collection), which exceeds in life-like portrayal, if not in simple dignity, the same subject which hangs in the Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam. And the highest point of all is reached in the *Boatmen* (Museum Mesdag, Hague), a subject which in its damp, dusky spaciousness comprises a whole social world, and confirms, perhaps best of all, the independent power of Israël's water-colour art.

But in spite of every peculiarity, there are many points of similarity between this and the rest of the master's work, for it is in itself a unit. The differences are never contradictions, but rather superficialities, which reflect the state of mind of a wonderfully prolific creator. In the depth, however, all is structurally united, even as the many branched tree in his roots.

Josef Israël is a complete organism in himself, and so he appears, even within that "Hague School" which has gloriously revived the old Dutch art of painting. Only to be compared with that of Rembrandt, the art of Israël shows itself in everything to be more closely confined to the natural; even his chiaroscuro has a more natural basis. And in this he places himself on a par with his comrades from the Hague. They also—both the landscape painters and the painters of interiors—have, like their predecessors, made as the object of their art that most precious Dutch possession, the light luminous atmospheres; but as sons of a modern period, inclined to impressionism, they have searchingly watched this nucleus of their art, given it fresh life and won from it a series of new tone values. Israël, however, placed midway between their joyous, light-coloured splendours a twilight, a song, a soul. Consequently, he was the heart of the school.

He died on the 10th August, 1911, at a very advanced age. He had the rare fortune of being able to gather in the harvest and of seeing his work completed.

REMINISCENCES OF THE MASTER'S STUDIO

It is now about fourteen years since I first met the master. It was upon a summer's day in 1909 that a friend of the family took me out to Scheveningen, where Israëls used regularly to spend his holidays in the Hotel d'Orange, facing the sea.

We had to wait rather a long time on the terrace overlooking the shore, for Israëls was sleeping. It was the first time I had seen the North Sea, sparkling under a crystal noon-day sky—but as the moments sped on I became seized with embarrassment to think that I would soon be standing before the man, for whom, in my youth I had conceived the utmost veneration. Filled as I was with such strong emotion, it was not unnatural that the events which followed seemed to pass before me as in a mist. Also I was not old enough to make any subjective observation, and thus, with fact and fancy curiously intermingled, my first meeting with Israëls took place.

A few minutes later all fear was forgotten, and I felt quite at home. For, frankly, the little bowed man in a dressing-gown, with his keen eyes blinking out of a freckled, bronzed and wizened face, had made matters quite easy from the beginning. He talked of my home, where he had forty years previously had business with an art-dealer, whose Italian-sounding name he could still remember. His was a wonderful memory, for he could still retain everything in spite of his many experiences.

In the meantime several visitors from America, who, during their travels, had wished to see the international "lion," had been turned away. And then rather an amusing incident happened: a fair young girl, the daughter of a family friend, came into the room and laughingly told of her failure in an examination, whereupon Israëls, half in jest and half in earnest, quite properly rebuked her. And it was with the same fine sense of humour, sometimes sharp and to the point, at others deep and full of wisdom, that he enlivened our talk later round the tea-table. The old man, chatting in English or German or falling back into his native tongue, managed to introduce a good deal of bright conversation into our talk, and always, after one of his humorous sallies, there flitted across the hairy, wrinkled face a sunny reflection of the warmth of his kindly nature.

He was then nearly 86 years old: but in spite of his great age, he used to drive every day to his studio at The Hague, where he worked until noon. At the conclusion of my visit, he invited me to go there. "You can come every day, if you like," he said, "only not on Saturday, for I do not work then, being still a Jew in that respect."

It was this passing remark which caused me to misunderstand

Israëls. For before I had met the master, it always appeared to me that, behind his art there must be the Jew. Such was indeed the fact, but in quite a different sense to the construction I had put upon it. Israëls was only by instinct a Jew; in this connection he once told me, when talking of a Jewish festival, that he had been pressed to take the head of the table, and was afterwards induced to make a drawing, which had later been used in Russia for Jewish propaganda, an incident not at all to his liking. In his own mind, he was a Dutchman, and he wished only to be considered as such. Once when he said "We," meaning "we Dutch people," I took it to mean "we Jews," and it was a long time before I learned to disabuse myself of this apparent contradiction.

I used often to visit him in his studio in the Koninginnegracht at The Hague, where for the first time the genius of the artist was directly revealed to me. A year later I came to stay for some time at The Hague, and was often able to run in to the house on the canal, where, between the old laurel bushes, one had a view of the broad, brightly-painted barges, and, beyond, the open meadowland with its tame deer. During working hours I used to go into the studio, but later on in the day, into the sitting-room or the little courtyard. I considered every word so important that I used to write it down as soon as possible in order that at some convenient time I might be able to draw a picture of the creative artist and the man.

It was in the late autumn that our friendship began. Israëls had had a good summer: he had been to Venice, where his works had had a room to themselves in an international exhibition. Also there he had had visible evidence of the honour done to him and it had been a great joy. His painting, *The Peasant's Mealtime*—formerly in the possession of Herr Cromer, of The Hague—had won the large gold medal, and was finally purchased by an American for 100,000 Dutch gulden. Israëls thought this a ridiculous sum and a criminally high price to pay for such a simply painted bit of canvas.

In his roomy studio—which was only lighted by *one* broad slanting window—were various works side by side, upon which the master was still engaged. An interior with an elderly peasant woman poking the open fire with a heavy iron poker in order to kindle a flame, while a boy was watching her, had just been finished. It was this picture which was exhibited later by the art dealer, Goupil, at The Hague, as Israëls' last work. And another one which was nearly finished was a portrait of Mr. Stats Forbes, who had just died, and who had collected in his London house an extraordinarily large number of Israëls' pictures. And a third, also nearly finished, was the stately water-colour *Venice*, a souvenir of the summer spent in the town of lagoons. And then there

was the oil painting of an angler (the replica of the water-colour in the Drucker collection at the Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam), and the water-colour of a beggar in a high cap, neither of which had made much progress. And only a rough sketchy outline in chalk on white ground represented the composition of a woman driving a cow.

A new light is thus thrown on the artist's method of working in this collection of canvasses, some just begun, others half finished or almost completed, comprising portraits, genre and landscape, all worked out in the most widely differing technique and expressive of many varying moods. In spite of his great age, his powers and interests were not lessened, and nature still remained for him an inexhaustible spring of ideas.

Nevertheless, he took a very wide view of nature. "I don't consider it advantageous to draw strictly according to nature, by continual study of her, because in that way one simply makes a copy. One should be able to see her properly and to realise her. It is sufficient for me to study a model well for half an hour: memory serves for the rest. As a matter of fact, however, I get the model to come back occasionally during the work, but only in order to obtain the simplest essential pose. I hold myself responsible for the physiognomy and the expression, and that is why the model and the picture ultimately differ so widely."

There is, of course, a difference between those works which are the direct outcome of continuous study of a nature model and others which are merely the creation of the artist, out of his rich store of memories. In the first case, the work is a struggle with a nature which is full of uneasiness and doubt; the artist is only able with difficulty to get away from his model, and it is then a thing of wonder how such a subject can give birth to a free and monumental work. This was the case in the *Woman by the Window* (in the Boymans Museum at Rotterdam). Israëls relates of this: "I had found a good model and so I painted her. But I was not satisfied, for I felt she was not in the correct position. And so she wandered from side to side of the canvas until she found the place and pose which she has to-day. But I was still not quite sure, and put the picture aside for a while and waited. Then one day there came to see me a very intelligent friend, who was, however, not an expert. I asked him, 'Is the person whom I have painted, in your opinion, really there?' 'Yes,' he replied. I asked, 'Is that feeling which I desire to express also really there?' And again his answer was in the affirmative. Nevertheless, I was not quite content. Meanwhile my son came over from Amsterdam. He looked at the picture and became quite angry: 'Now, do stop daubing it all over everywhere, or you will never be finished,' he said. However, shortly after this, I received a commission of representatives from Rotterdam,

who desired to purchase the picture for the Museum there, and requested me to lend it to them for a few days, but they then stated that the hands were still not 'correct,' and must be painted again. I was thus thrown back upon my old doubts, but at this juncture, the Paris Salon came to my rescue, and the picture was greeted there with great acclamation, and so it remained in its original state."

We know to-day that it is just those hands, "refused" by the censor, which add to the masterly character of the picture. Indeed, Israëls had devoted especial attention to the hands and had endowed them with the highest power of expression. He referred once to the man in *Alone in the World*—Museum Mesdag, Hague (pl. XLIV)—in whose hands was expressed the weight of his sorrow, and also to the water-colour drawing of the beggar, upon which he was occupied at the time of our meeting. This depicted an uncouth vagabond peasant, sitting on a bench, black on grey—in the misty hovering tone of Israëls' later colouring—against which the flesh tints of the cheeks and the reddish beard around the mouth formed a warm contrast. But the expression did not lie in his full countenance; it was manifested in the horny hands clasped tightly round the knee. One could understand what Israëls meant when he asked: "Do you believe that the man *is there*?" For the external being and the internal soul were united in those hands, and it was the illustration of this fact, *i.e.* a fullest possible representation of the truth of life, to which the artist attached the greatest importance.

Two other unfinished compositions—creations of the mind and fantasy—bore signs of the labour which had previously been spent on them. One of them, however, was no more than a sketch. Upon a fairly large canvas, in fleeting outlines, there was shown in generous curves the general make-up of the composition, that is, the architecture of the scheme. Near to it, on the lower right corner, was a smaller drawing which indicated more clearly the intention of the picture. This was a cow being forced to move by a boy who was dragging it by a halter in front. The firm lines, nowhere rubbed, described the attitude of the animal quite as surely as the posture of the woman driving it, and gave a living impression of the tired youth pulling in front. And finally the indivisible construction of the whole—all disclosed the fact that Israëls' drawing, even the first broad outlines, possessed a living power, and that, in certain cases, especially where an effect of mobility in an actual model was desired, the drawing was the basis of his work to which all else had to conform.

There was possible, however, another way of commencing a work, not in lines but in colour. Take as an example the picture of the angler; it was near noon when I entered the studio and Israëls had, as he told me, begun upon it about ten o'clock. In spite of the short period of

only two hours, the picture—the labour of a man nearly ninety years old, was practically finished from the colour point of view. It must be admitted, however, that the man with the rod and the tree upon which he leaned were only indicated by a few dark-brown streaks. The pale blue of the water and the bright green of the plants and the transparent tone of the sky had already been composed, and displayed a finely thought-out whole. Israëls said: “I have only tentatively put on the colour because I do not yet know what it should be. I am seeking to express a feeling which I do not yet think is quite clear even to myself.”

This picture, and what the master thought about it, seemed to me remarkable in more ways than one, for it reveals the fact that this painter, whose sense of colour is sometimes under-estimated, actually obtained his effects by means of colour and tone. Further, that in such colour compositions, the subject represented was unimportant, or even negligible, and was only of secondary consideration. And, finally, in such a case colour, as an instrument of sensibility, was the medium chosen to express, in a thoroughly lyrical way, the gentle undefined longing of the artist's soul.

It will be seen, from the methods mentioned above, that there are two types of Israëls' pictures. The artist best realised that himself, and helped us to discover the important difference. After he had shown us a water-colour painted direct from life, he placed another beside it and said: “There, do you see, that is the *second* Israëls?” It was a landscape by the sea, with a girl in the dunes, quite carried away by the desolation of an autumnal atmosphere. And thus Israëls was revealed, on the one hand, in actual living beings, and on the other, in melodious harmony.

This difference, however, arises from two causes, for the fully matured man had an absolutely individual personality; his work progressed structurally upward. He did not take a sentimental, but rather a material point of view of life, so that his observation was centred on the outward appearance as well as on the spiritual surroundings of the fisher-folk, the peasants and Jews whom he painted. We were once talking about Millet. I had reminded the master of the words of the great Frenchman when he was refuting the idea that sympathy drew him to his material. Israëls answered quickly: “I understand Millet's point of view, and I agree with him entirely: it is the same with me—I am drawn by no other motive than the picturesque to my subjects. Nevertheless I let myself get into closer touch with my people than Millet did: I sympathise with them in their sorrows as well as in the unconscious humour of their children. I try to transfer myself absolutely into their world, and then to reproduce the true living impression of that world into my pictures.”

Thus it is clear that direct truth, and the unconscious dignity of life in its most primitive form, appeared to be the starting-off point and goal of the master's art, even into late old age. But the question remained as to how far his own feelings were involuntarily mingled with those of his subjects, in order that in many cases (namely, when he was in lyric mood) he could fully master his work. Israëls did not wish it to be thought that he was a Jew, but a Dutchman, and he desired only to be thought of as a painter. His manhood was therefore subjected to his art, but he had not the power to prevent his richly developed qualities influencing his works, thereby endowing them with an inimitable character and, at the same time, obtaining a wonderfully attractive result.

During our conversations which touched on the general nature of Israëls' art, we very often spoke of his life and the destiny of his pictures. His clearest recollections were of the days of his youth with all the many changes, and of the difficult beginnings of his artistic career. But there was not the slightest trace of sentiment in these memories. A deep sense of humour, which governed his whole sunny outlook on life pervaded his whole being. And then there was a kind of fatalism about him: he liked to quote Goethe: "Man thinks he drives, but is himself driven." That was his life's motto.

"Groningen!" The name of his native town warmed him and he leaned back comfortably in his armchair and chatted about his nursery and his father and mother. He spoke of his father, who was intellectually a great deal more active than is generally the case with a man of such limited means, and he had a large enough outlook on life to value art and not to induce the boy to follow a more lucrative occupation. And then Israëls talked of his mother, who had a closer place in his heart, and how she had proclaimed as a revelation of great genius, the very first attempts, his clumsy portrait sketches of friends and acquaintances of the hospitable house. "Among these, there was once found a likeness of our baker, who sent a cake to my mother in return. My mother was quite astonished, and asked him when she met him later whether my scribble was really worth such a beautiful cake."

The conversation often turned on the courses he took in Amsterdam under the tuition of Kruseman and of Picot in Paris. And then again of his happy home-coming to the little place in the Warmoestraat, happy in spite of the fact that life remained difficult and poverty-stricken, for the fighting power of this twenty-four years old artist remained unabated and his optimism helped him through his worst times. Care for his daily bread was the lightest trouble he had to bear. "In order to live, I was obliged often to paint portraits for 5, 10, or at the most 30 gulden, but my demands were very modest and so I did not suffer any depriva-

tion. In spite of my lack of money I have, however, never borrowed a penny. But yes, I did so once, and it came about so : Among my friends in Amsterdam there was an old journalist, with whom I was in close touch. One morning he came to me rather distressed, for there was no money in the house and he had had a bad quarrel about it with his wife. He wanted to borrow 10 gulden of me : of course, I hadn't got them, but I went to another friend and borrowed them. Five of them the debtor paid back, but he died before returning the other five and," (this with a humorous twinkle) " we shall have to settle it between us up there."

This incident had occurred at a time when Israëls was filling an enormous canvas with a scene from the story of Aaron, the high priest, and he had to climb up on the boxes of the hat-maker's with whom he was living to reach it. The work was commenced to an accompaniment of jeers and shouts of derisive laughter from a friend, a singer, who had come in and found this Hop-o'-my-thumb busily engaged on his tottering tower. And derision always seemed to follow the clever—almost too clever—enterprise of this artistic youth. A critic had written some biting words about the beginner's colour methods, and when he returned to the Academy he found it hanging again on the wall of his cubicle. Meanwhile he had been home to Groningen. A newspaper had been purchased and his father had settled himself down with the remark : " Now I am going to see what my son can do." And then he had read the criticism ; his son sat there very embarrassed, but the father, being a good man, said, " Oh ! that does not matter," which was, after all, the right way to take it, and in spite of everything, the young man was encouraged in his self-confidence. It must be admitted, however, that the painful episode did not finish there ; it was but one of a series of small annoying incidents, of which mention is made later. Israëls, however, had every reason to blame himself for the treatment of his earliest picture. He used to talk about it occasionally. And it is well known that one of his works was once hung on the inside of a door at an exhibition, so that it could only be seen when the door was shut, that is, when nobody was there. And during the first part of his time in Amsterdam it also fell out that an honest tradesman had purchased from him for a few gulden, a study of a man's head, and after some time had sent it to the exhibition. The good man then thought that he would have a good day and went off to the exhibition to admire his property, but he returned with the astounding information that the picture was nowhere to be found. " And so we all went. Lots of rooms with innumerable pictures but—Nothing ! We were quite despondent. At last in the furthest, poorest little chamber, the floor of which was red tiled, we found it, right up against the ceiling. I looked up at my

patron sadly : ' How can I save myself from that, what can I do?' I asked him. ' Paint,' he said, and repeated it, ' Paint.' " The old Israëls laughed heartily as he related the little story to me, and then added : " So you see I took his advice and have followed it out. ' Paint, and again Paint !' "

Many such reminiscences and also others from an earlier period—sometimes only anecdotes, but interesting as part of the revelation of an extraordinary character, were often heard. And at times he would relate something especially intimate about his wife (his life companion) or about his son, all so lovably told that one hardly likes to repeat it. At nearly every visit mention was made of the history of the works which had played a part in the master's development. Israëls remembered every detail connected with the external destiny as well as the inner progress. The following might be related as illustrative of this :

One day I had brought with me the lithographic prints of earlier works which had been published by *Die Kunstchronijk*. Among them was *Winter*, which Isaac Israëls, who was present, took at the first glance, perhaps only jokingly, for a Vincent van Gogh. His father, however, protested with curious energy against this, as if he would not have one of his works taken from him at any price. He told us with regard to the engraving *Muse*, that it had served as title page for the *Dream of Youth*, by the poet Jan van Beers. This brought the conversation round to his own poetical attempts. " Yes ; I have often made bad verses. But when it came over me, I had to do it, I could not fight against it. It has even happened that in the midst of painting I have had to stop and sit down at my writing table, where I have with the utmost difficulty succeeded in putting the verses on paper." And it is due to his poetical activities that *Ida, the fisher maiden, at the door* was evolved, a painting, the reproduction of which has enjoyed great popularity. " I had intended at that time to write a novel under this title, but I found the thing too difficult for me, and so instead this picture was evolved. I had the luck to find as model an uncommonly beautiful girl. Its success was even greater than the *Meditation*, which laid the foundation of my popularity. The old man Pieneman said : " My son, even if you live to be 70 you will never do anything more beautiful." It was the same with *The Day before the Funeral*. The picture was painted when Israëls was engaged to be married, and was immediately recognised everywhere. " Whilst it was being shown in Amsterdam, I made my way to the exhibition, and even on my entrance a delightful episode greeted me, for the porter, who did not know me, asked me if I had brought a handkerchief with me, so that I could have a good cry before the picture."

Our talk also turned on similar experiences from the youthful years

of the artist, filled as they were with his struggle for the modest success which was so slow in coming. It was only natural that they should have made a deeper impression on the soul of the old man than the later, more sunny days of his ever increasing renown. But it would take too long to tell of the conversation which led up to the ripper works of the master. It might also give the impression that Israëls towards the end of his life gave himself up to his recollections. That was absolutely not so. Up to the last he wished only to be considered what he really still was : a vigorous man, for ever striding forward, who had only just returned happy and fresh from his Italian travels.

He always tried with his happy humour to pass lightly over any signs of bodily weakness in every way possible, but gradually the heart and the feet would not respond properly, and once when he was being carried in the invalid chair from the studio to the sitting-room he said with a twinkling in his eyes : " You must know that I only do this out of love for my people : if I wished, I could easily go upstairs alone." And upon another occasion when we were talking of the walks he so loved to take in the woods at The Hague he said : " If only my feet desired what I desire ! But people are always overtaking me. And," (with a double meaning) " you will understand that it is painful for me to remain behind the others."

A sharp coldness set in. When he sat before the hearth in the evening, his delicate hands folded before him, it seemed as if he could not have enough warmth. His body had become so small, that a shawl could almost cover him. But his spirit remained wonderfully vigorous. One last speech, on a warm afternoon in the courtyard, revealed this matured soul. It was just then that he used to quote on every occasion wise saws, and among others one which had become his maxim : " Renown runs away from him who would pursue her."

He was quite happy as man and as artist. His work was complete. He had no further wish. And thus he died, like those patriarchs of whom it is written : " He died in a good old age, an old man and full of years."





EDITORIAL NOTE

The works of Josef Israëls are very numerous and are scattered all over the world. A large number are still to be found in Holland (the Rijksmuseum alone being in possession of 30 paintings and water-colours—the gift of Mr. and Mrs. J. C. J. Drucker-Fraser of London). In addition to those in numerous public collections in Europe and America, many works have been acquired by private collectors. In compiling this volume an effort has been made to include reproductions, not only of the better known works of the artist, but also of various paintings, drawings, and etchings by him which are not now accessible to the public.

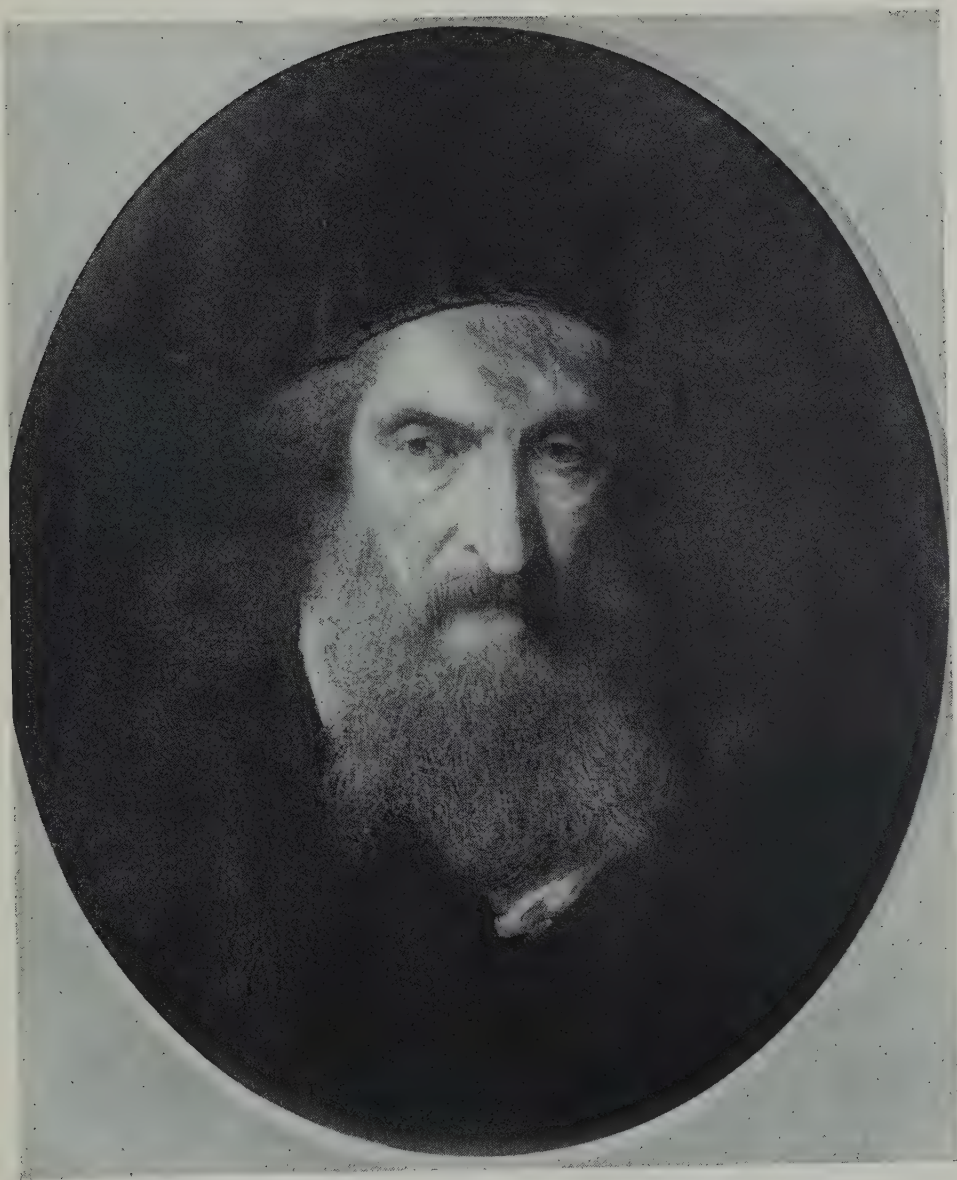
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(In the possession of Lord Cable)

PLATE I. THE JEWELLER OF AMSTERDAM



(In the Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam)

PLATE II. ELEAZAR HERSCHEL (1847)

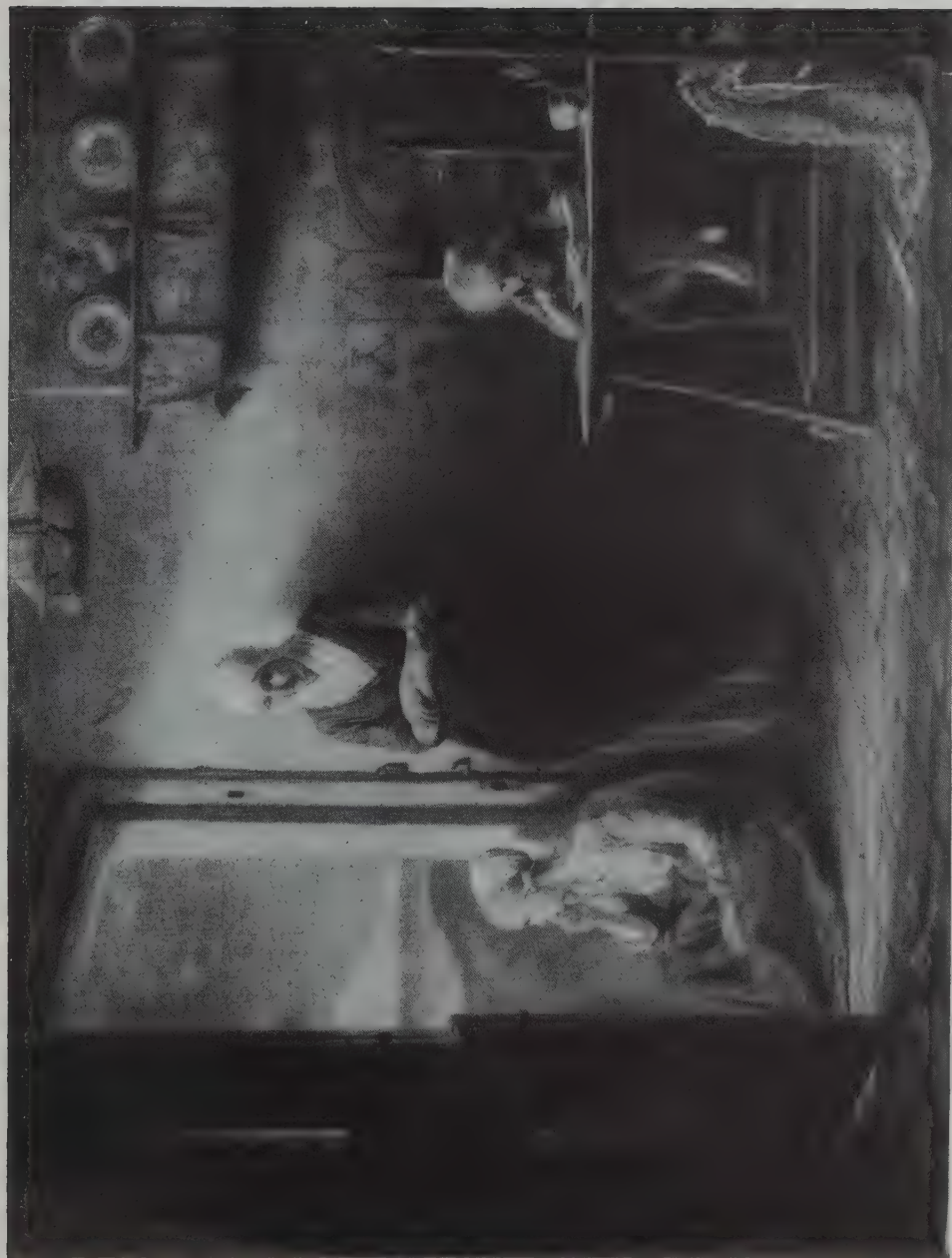


PLATE III. MEDITATION (1850)



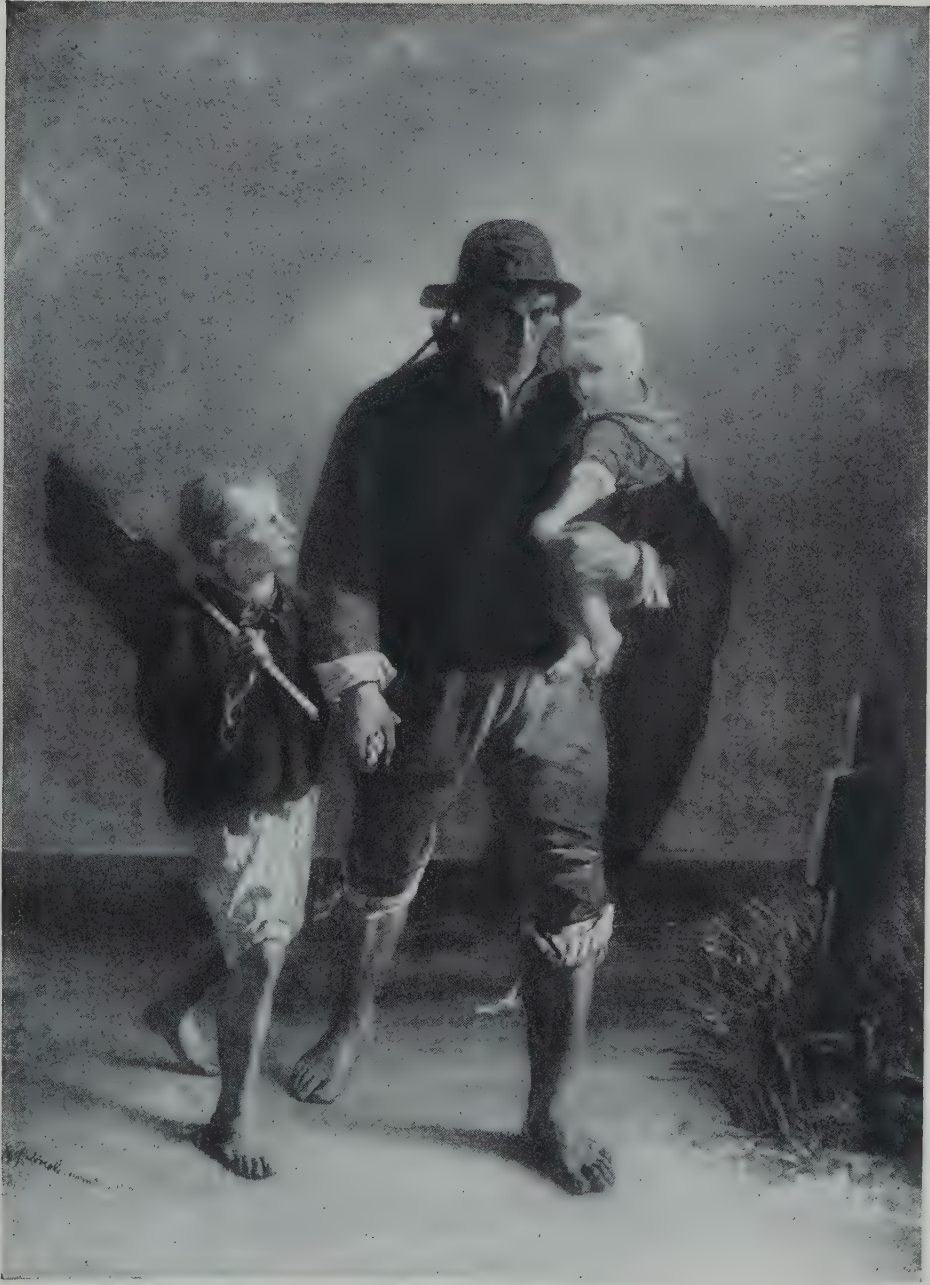
(In the possession of Messrs. Buffer & Zonen, Amsterdam)

PLATE IV. OLDENBARNEVELD'S LAST LETTER (1852)



(In the Stedelijke Museum, Amsterdam)

PLATE V. AFTER THE STORM (1858)



(In the Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam)

PLATE VI. PASSING MOTHER'S GRAVE (1858)

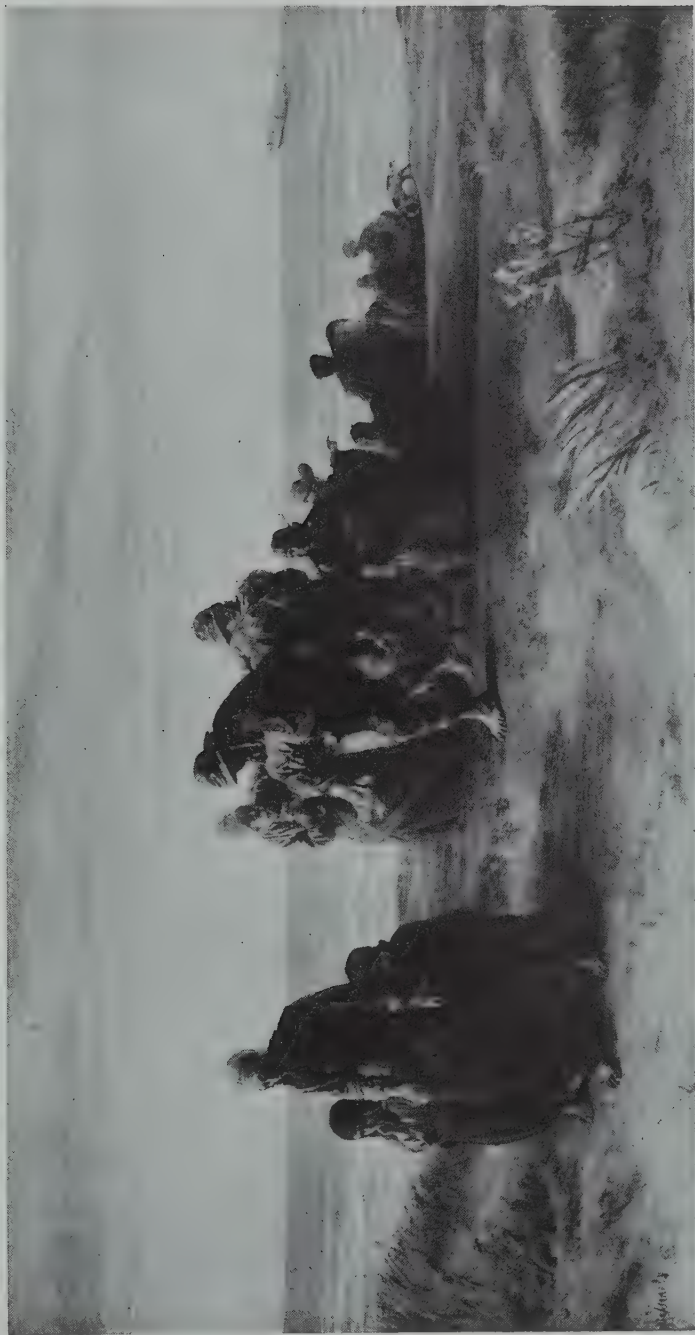


(By courtesy of "Kunstchronik")

PLATE VII. IN THE DUNES. (LITHOGRAPH)



PLATE VIII. THE DEPARTURE (1861)



*(From the original in the National Gallery, presented by the
Executors of the late Alexander Young)*

PLATE IX. THE SHIPWRECKED MARINER (1861)

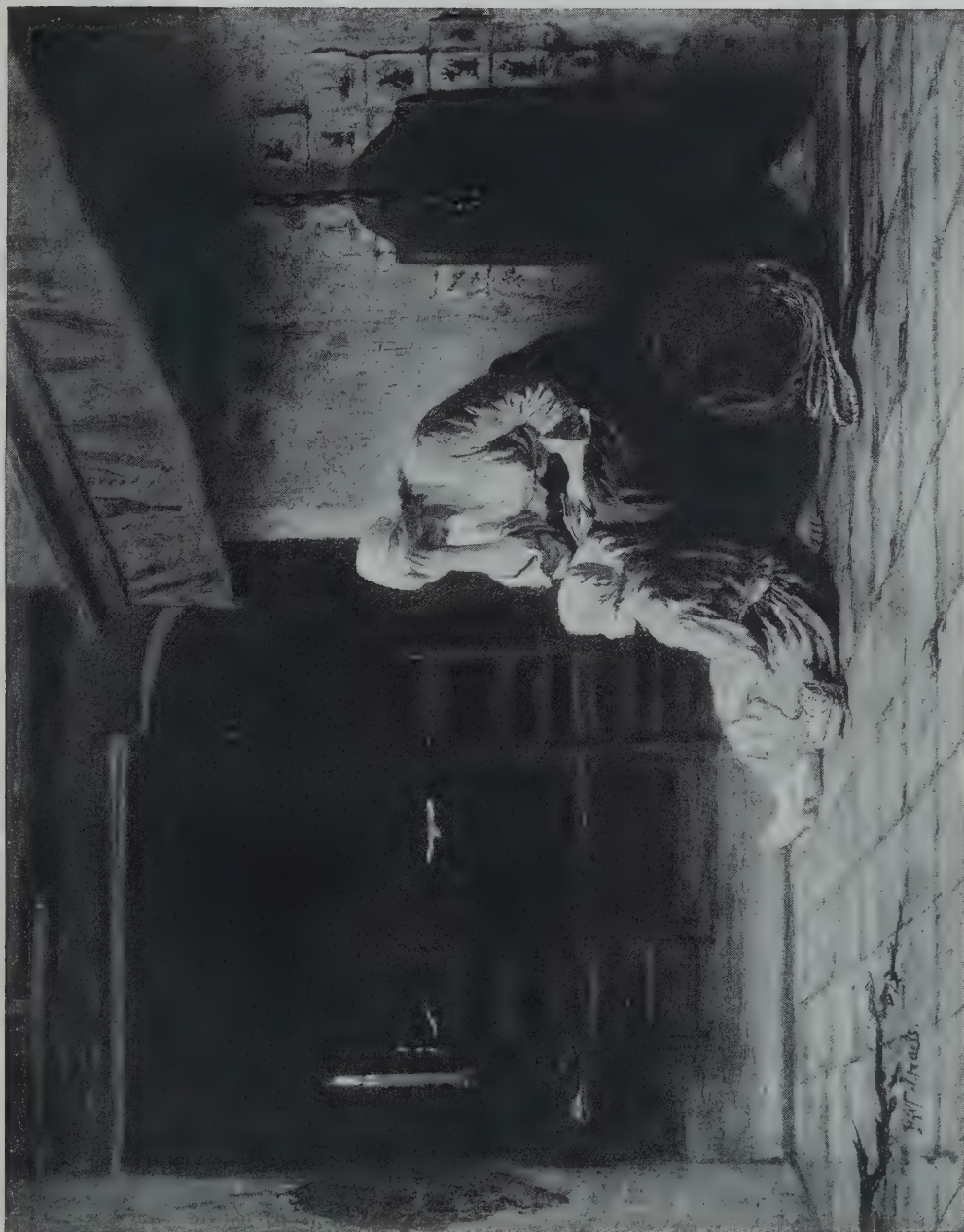


PLATE X. THE DAY BEFORE THE FUNERAL (1862)



(In the Stedelijk Museum,
Amsterdam)

PLATE XI. PLAYING WITH THE
TOY BOAT (1863)



PLATE XII. THE YOUNG HOUSEWIFE (1865)

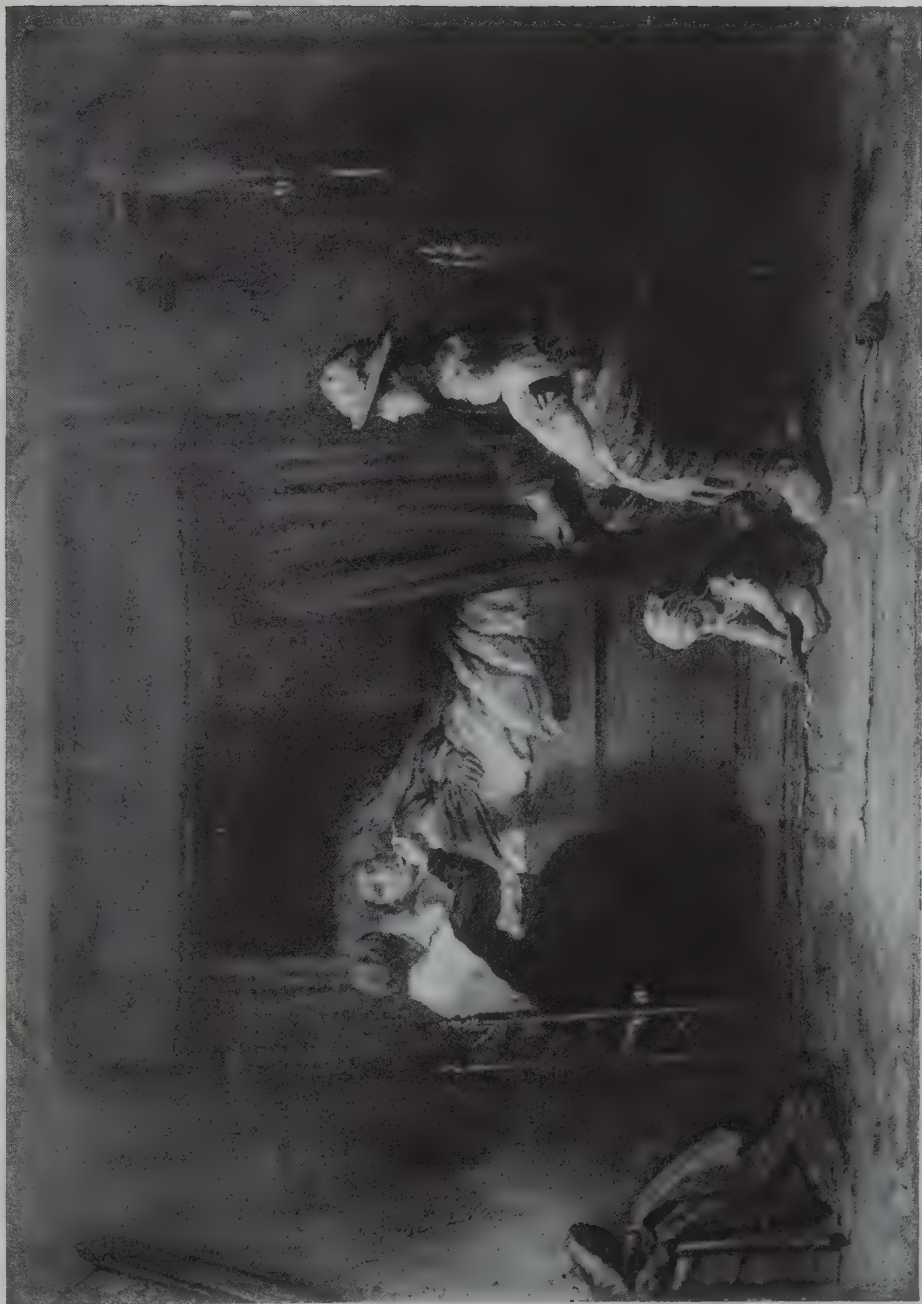


PLATE XIII. CONVALESCENCE (1869)



PLATE XIV. CHILDREN OF THE SEA



PLATE XV. APRÈS LA MESSE



PLATE XVI. THE COTTAGE MADONNA



PLATE XVII. THE INDUSTRIOUS MOTHER



(In the possession of Sir James Murray)

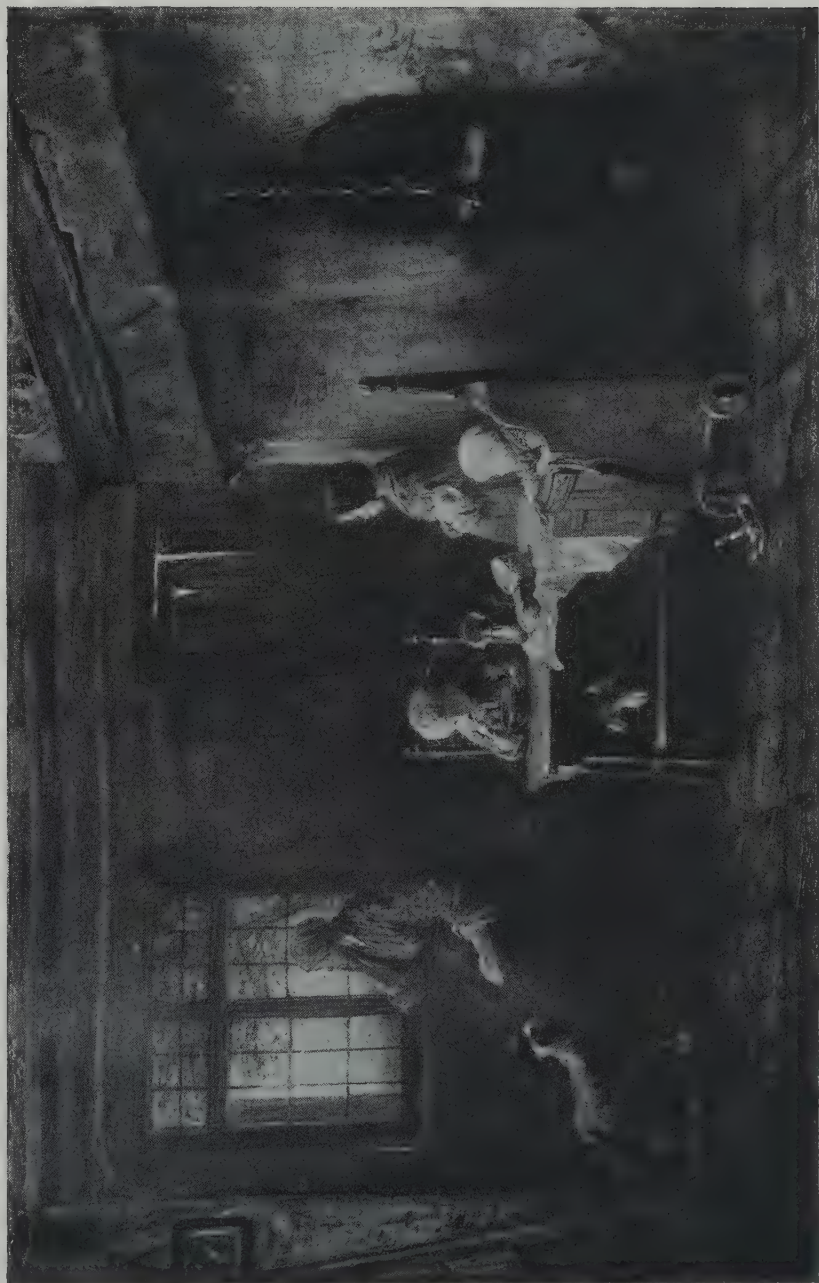


PLATE XIX. THE ANXIOUS FAMILY

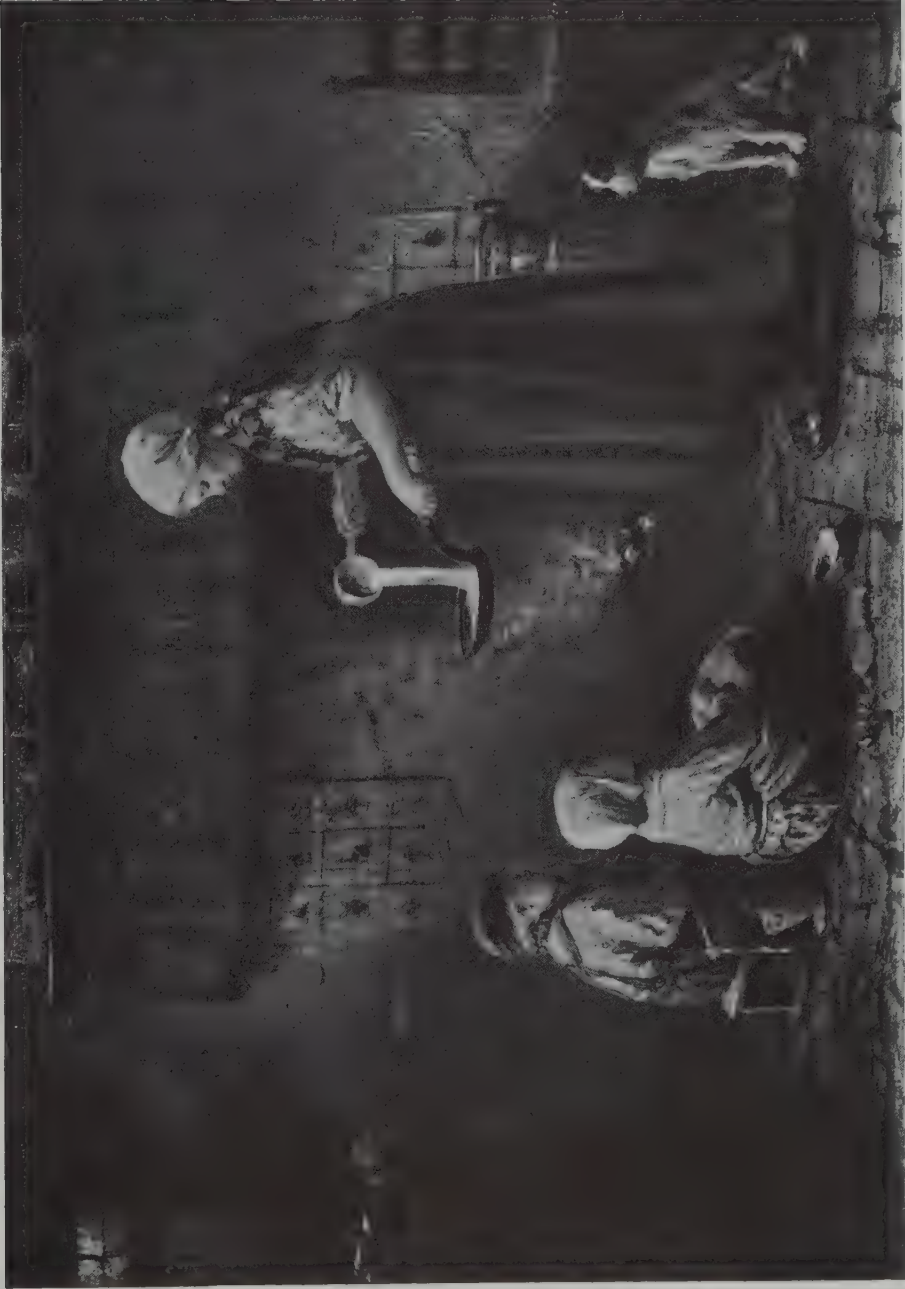


PLATE XX. PANCAKE-MAKING



PLATE-XXI. THE FAMILY MEAL



PLATE XXII. A RAY OF SUNSHINE



PLATE XXIII. ARMY AND NAVY

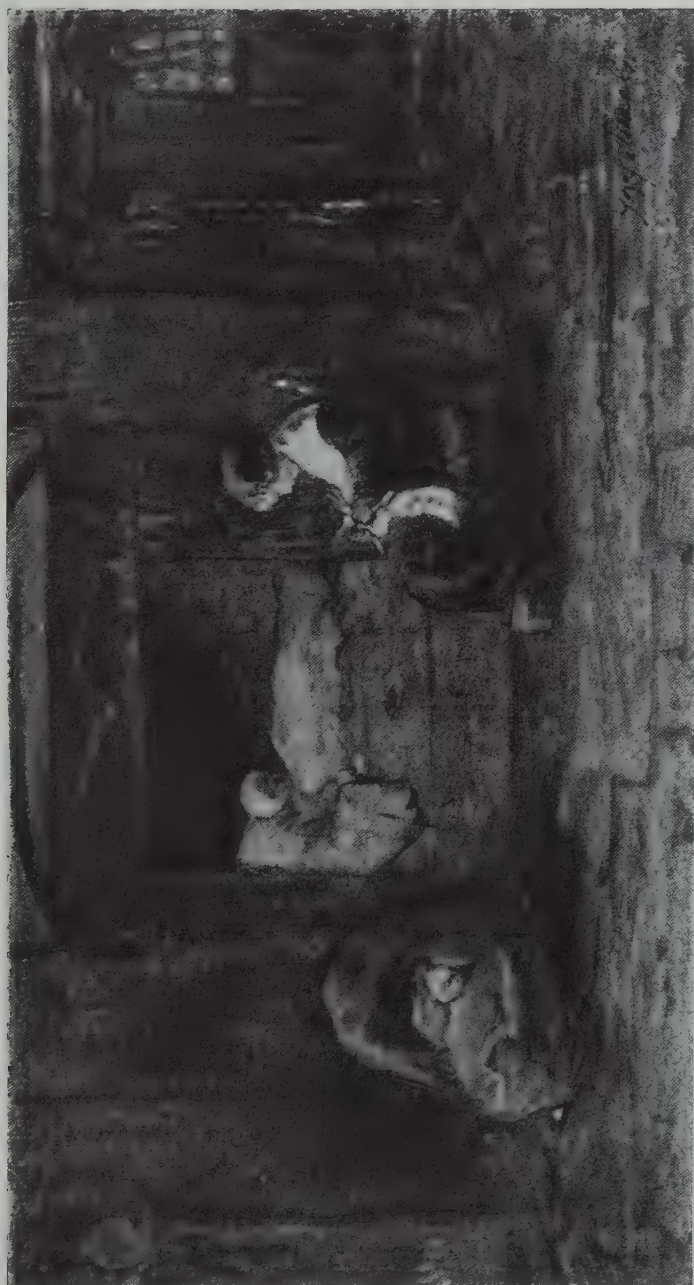


PLATE XXIV. IN THE SICK ROOM



(In the Preyer Collection, Scheveningen)

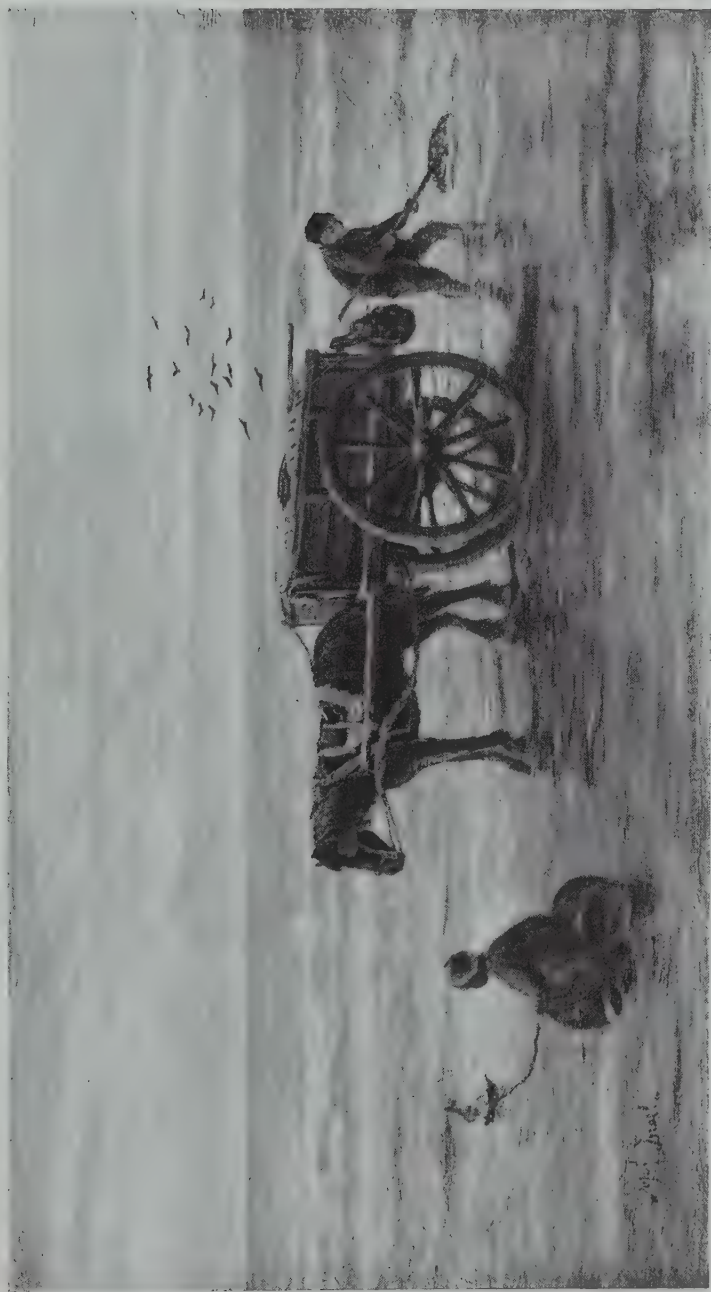


PLATE XXVI. GATHERING SEAWEED



PLATE XXVII. EXPECTATION



PLATE XXVIII. WASHING-DAY

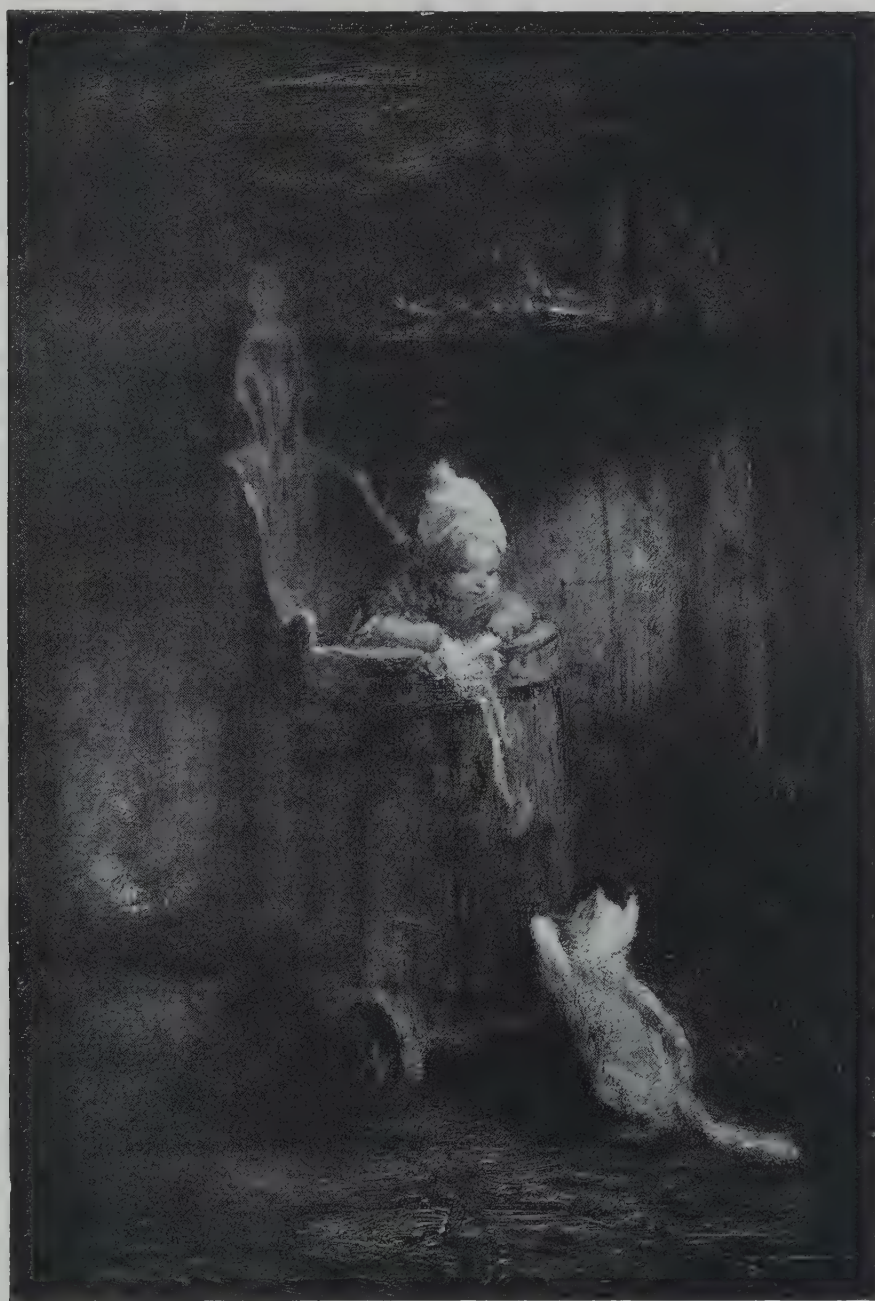


PLATE XXIX. INFANCY

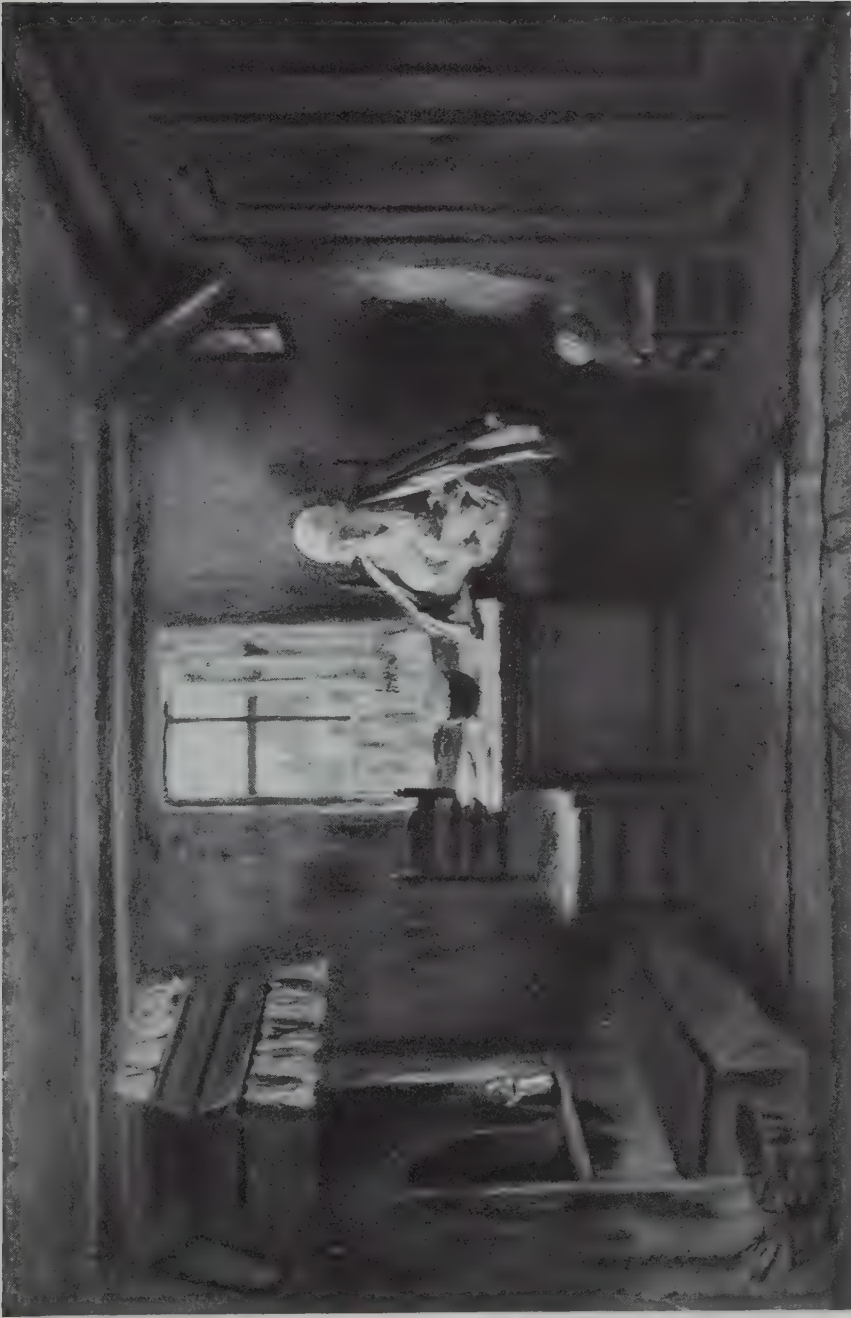


PLATE XXX. THE YOUNG MOTHER

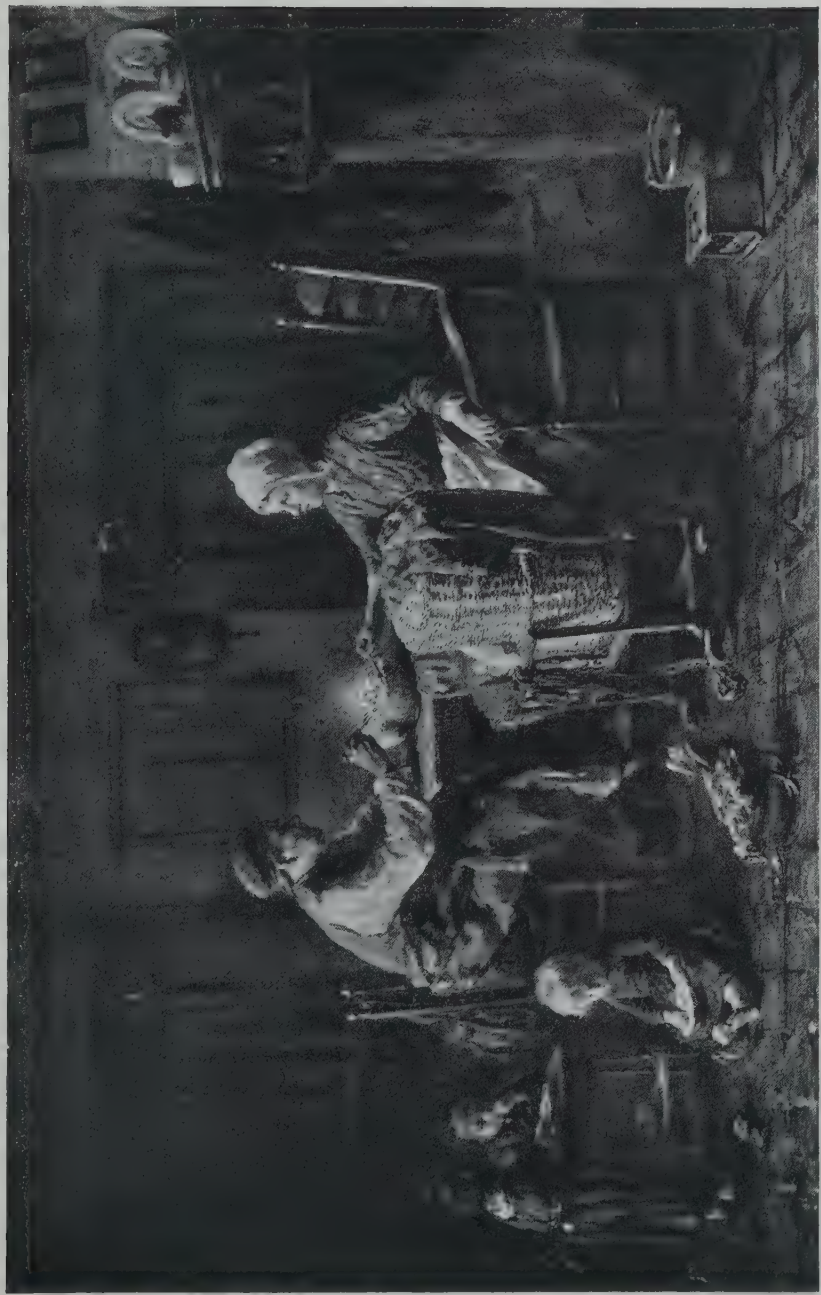


PLATE XXXI. BABY'S TOILET



(In the Stedelijk Museum, The Hague)

PLATE XXXII. THE SEAMSTRESS



(In the Glasgow Art Gallery)



(In the Drucker Collection,
Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam)

PLATE XXXIV. MATERNAL JOY



PLATE XXXV. THE SEXTON AND HIS WIFE



PLATE XXXVI. THE PANCAKE



PLATE XXXVII. DISCUSSION

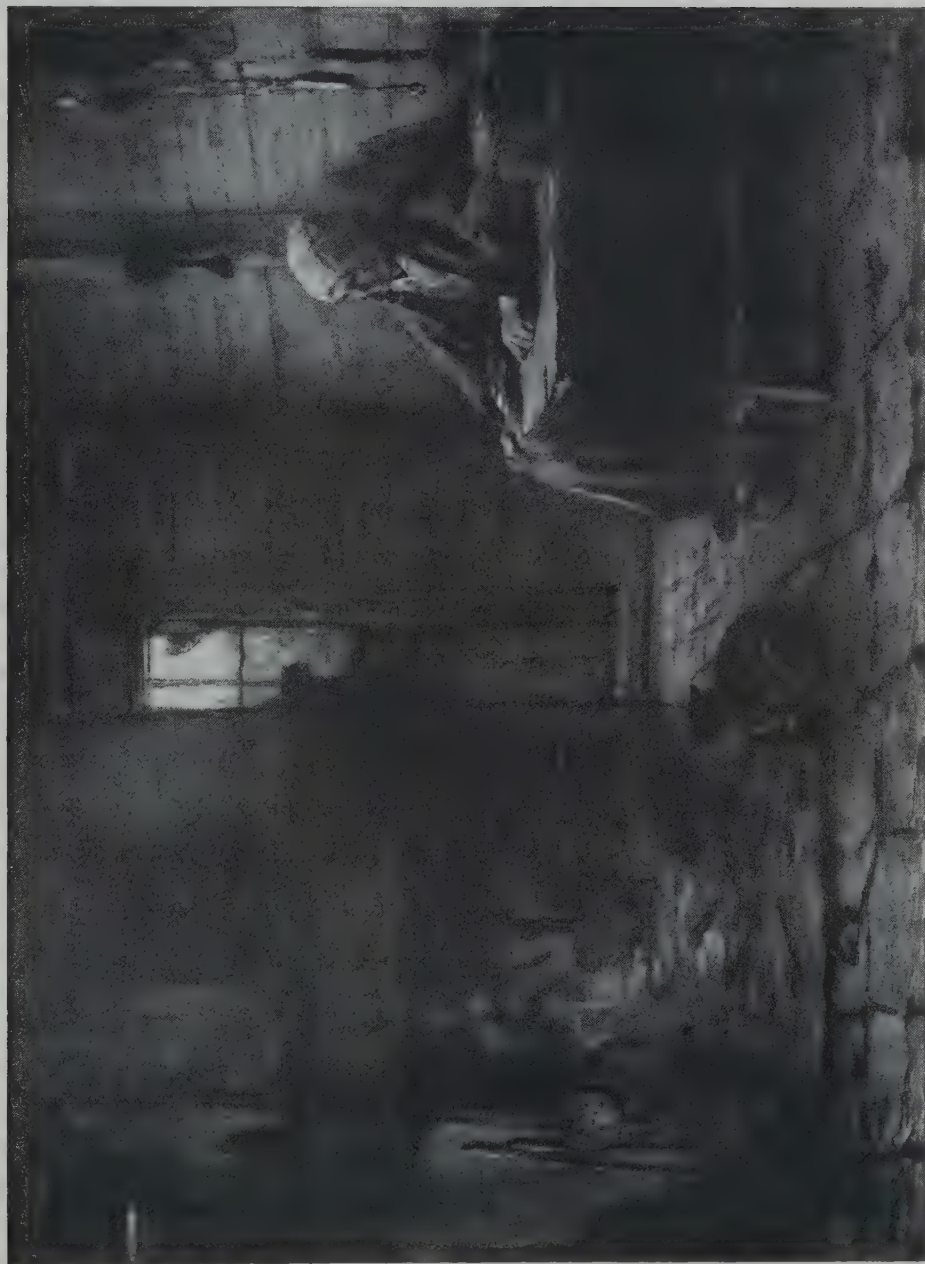


PLATE XXXVIII. MEMORIES



PLATE XXXIX. IN THE CHIMNEY CORNER



PLATE XL. MENDING THE NETS



PLATE XII. COMRADES



PLATE XLII. DINNER-TIME IN A COUNTRY COTTAGE AT DELDEN

(In the Dordrecht Museum)



(In the Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam)

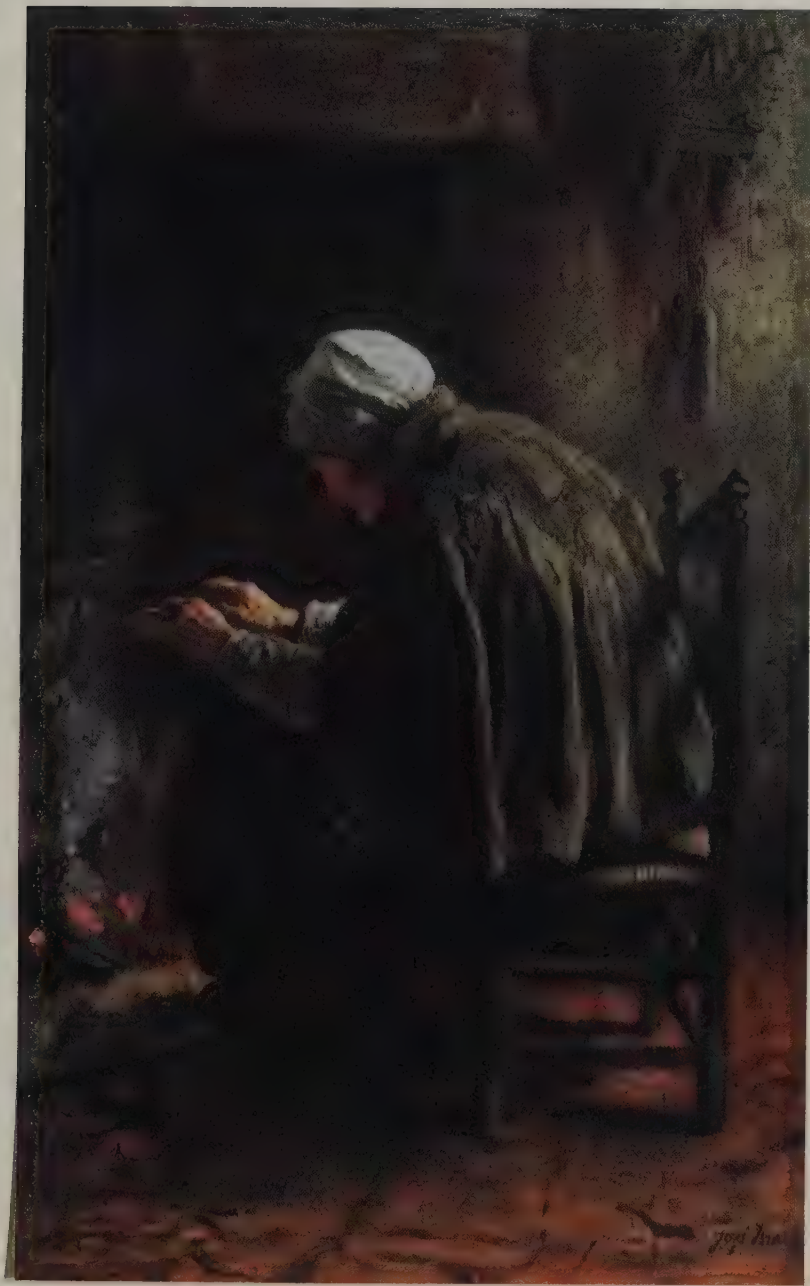


(In the Mesdag Museum, The Hague)

PLATE XLIV. ALONE IN THE WORLD



PLATE XLV. OLD AGE (ETCHING, 1883)



*(In the Museum of Modern Art,
The Hague. By permission of the
heirs of Mr. Hijmans van Wadenoyen)*

PLATE XLVI. WHEN ONE IS OLD



PLATE XLVII. KLEINE JAANTJE



PLATE XLVIII. IN A SUNLIT GLEN



(In the Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam)

PLATE XLIX. A VILLAGE IDYLL (1905)



(In the Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam)

PLATE L. NEIGHBOURLY GOSSIP

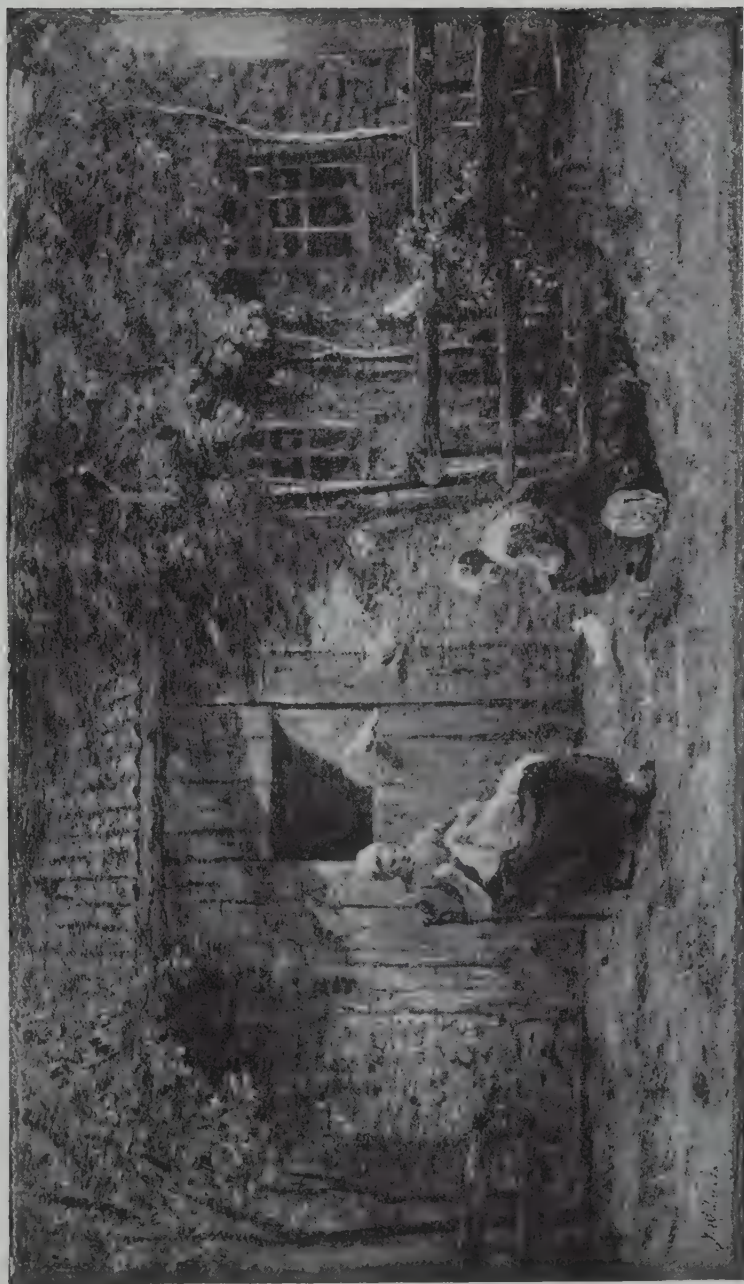


PLATE LI. FEEDING THE PIGEONS



PLATE LII. A FISHER GIRL



PLATE LIII. THE FISHERMAN'S DAUGHTER



(In the Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam)

PLATE LIV. HOMEWARD BOUND



(In the Preyer Collection, Schenningen)

PLATE LV. THE SHEPHERD AT EVENTIDE



(In the possession of L. J. Krüger, Esq., The Hague)



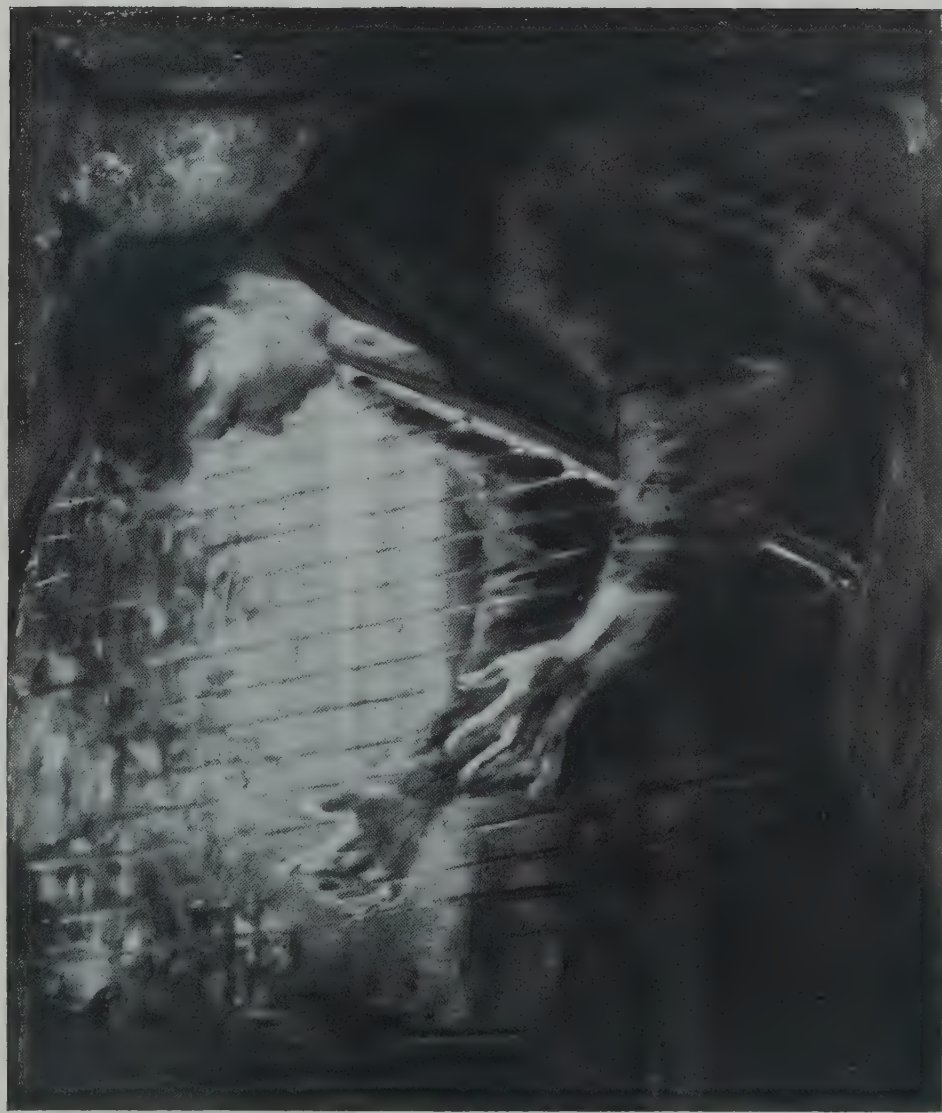
*(In the Drucker Collection,
Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam)*

PLATE LVII. A JEWISH WEDDING



(In the Drucker Collection, Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam)

PLATE LVIII. IN MELANCHOLY MOOD



(In the Mesdag Museum, The Hague)



(In the Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam)

PLATE LX. DAVID AND SAUL



(By courtesy of L. J. Krüger, Esq.,
The Hague)

PLATE LXI. HOMEWARD FROM LABOUR
(OIL SKETCH)



(In the Mesdag Museum, The Hague)

PLATE LXII. THE COURT-YARD (OIL SKETCH)



(In the possession of Dr. Victor Smith)



PLATE LXIV. RETURNING FROM THE FIELDS (WATER-COLOUR)

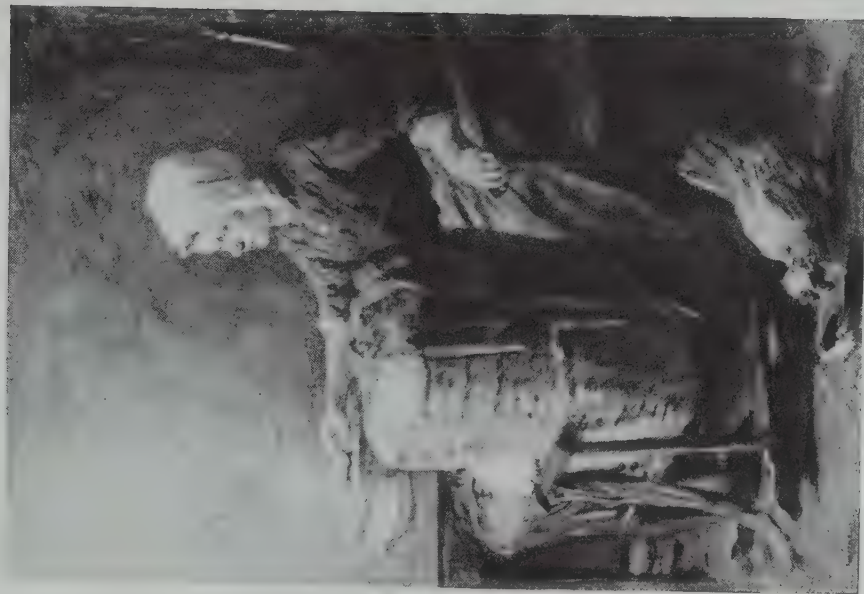


PLATE LXV. THE COBBLER'S MEAL and MEAL TIME (WATER-COLOURS)

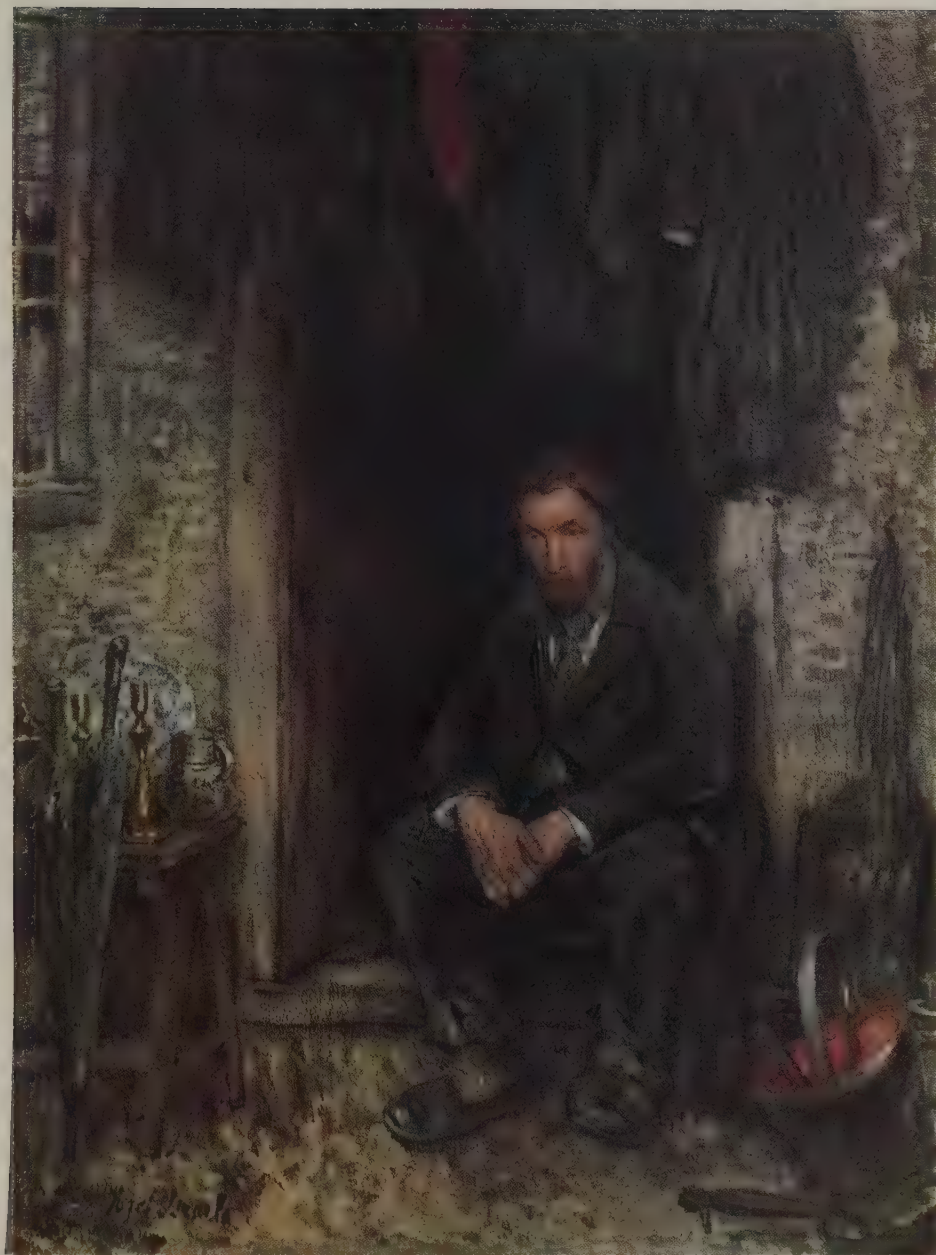


PLATE LXVI THE PIG-STY (WATER-COLOUR)



*(In the Drucker Collection,
Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam)*

PLATE LXVII. THE TODDLER
(WATER-COLOUR, 1888)



(In the Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam.
By permission of the Vereeniging tot het
vormen van eene openbare verzameling
van hedendaagsche kunst, Amsterdam)

PLATE LXVIII. A SON
OF THE ANCIENT RACE



PLATE LXIX. THE OLD SCRIBE. SELF-PORTRAIT (WATER-COLOUR)

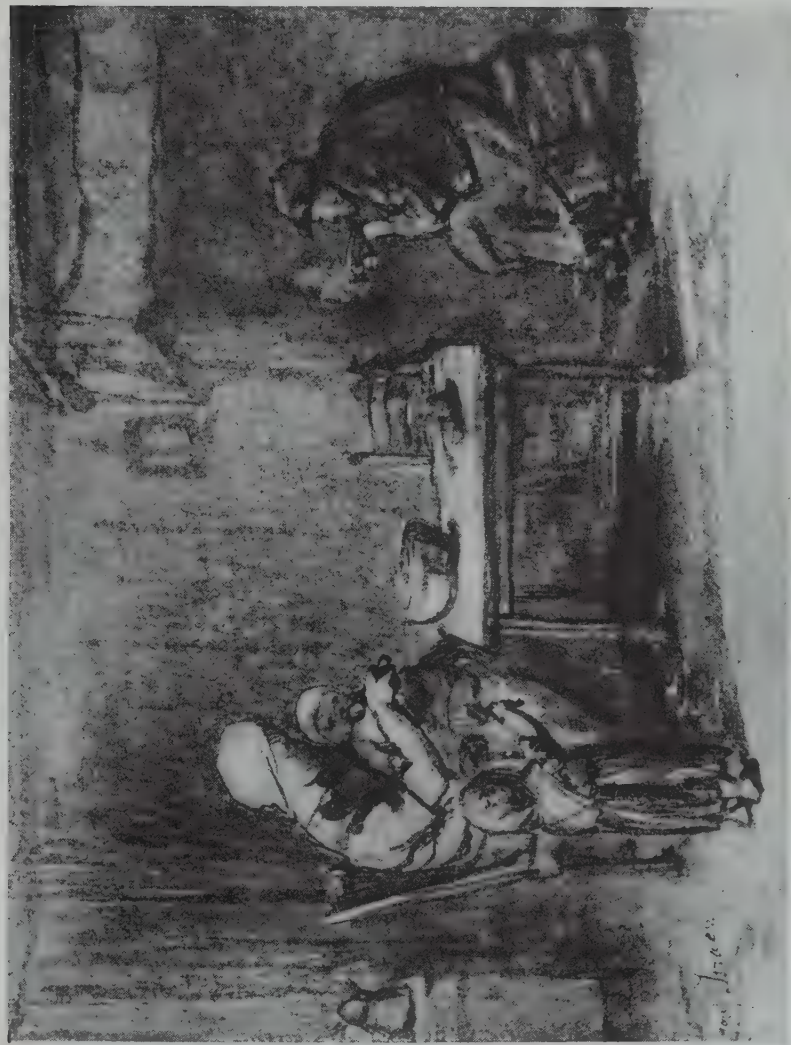
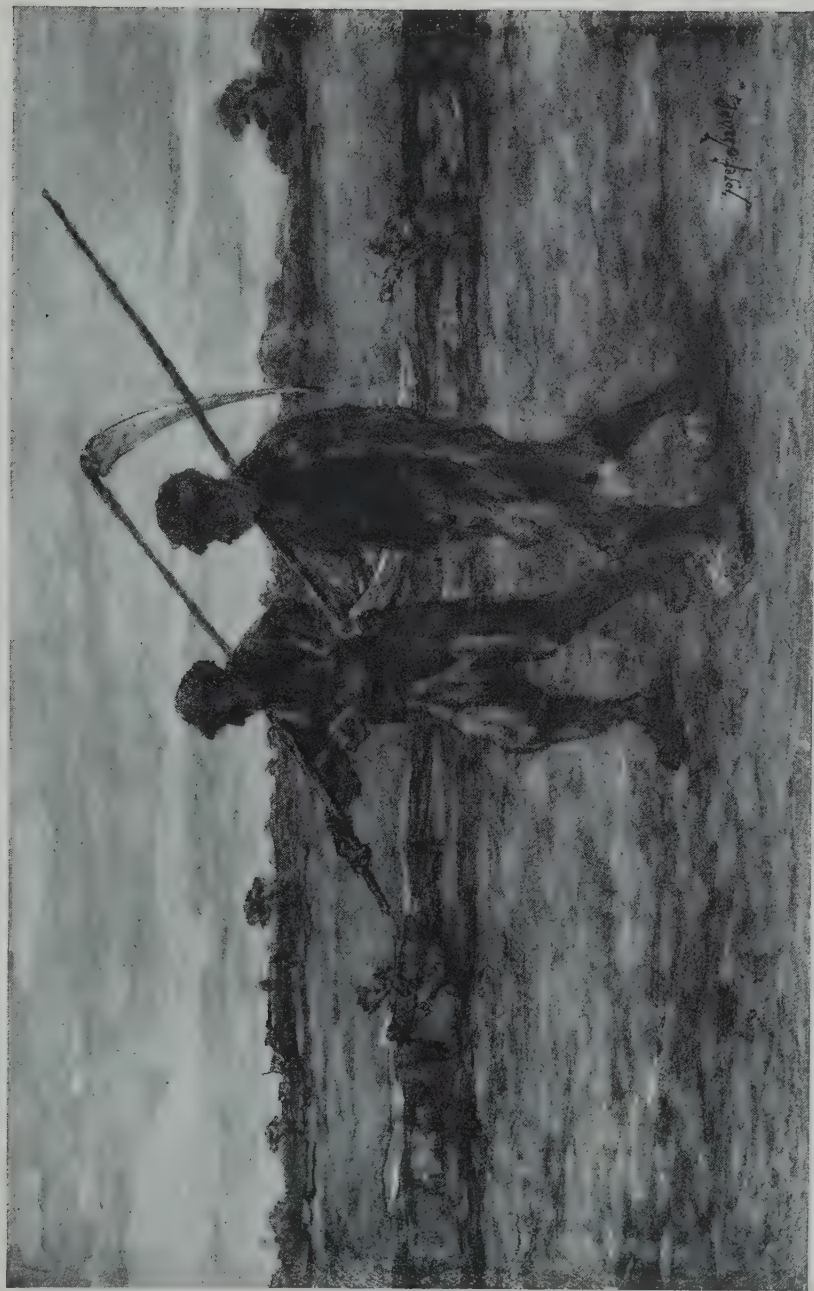
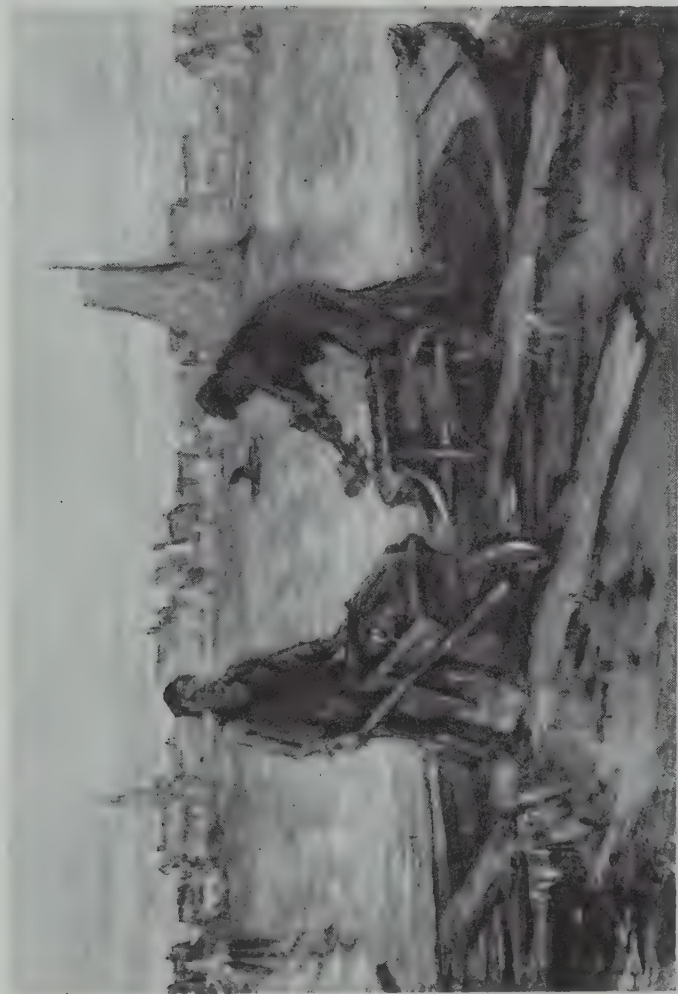


PLATE LXX. THE PEASANT'S HOME (WATER-COLOUR)



(In the Drucker Collection, Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam)

PLATE LXXI. THE MOWERS (WATER-COLOUR)



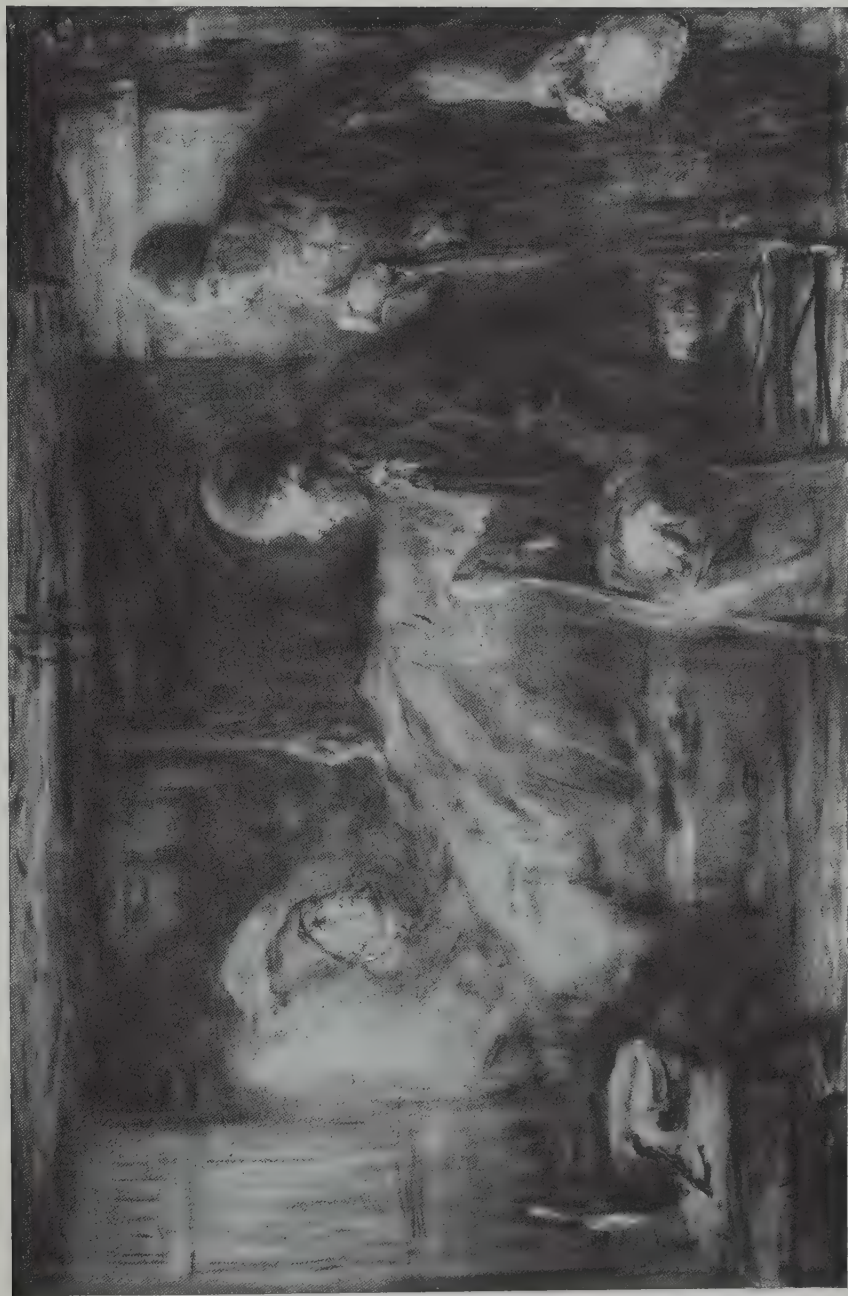
(In the Mesdag Museum, The Hague)

PLATE LXXII. THE DREDGERS (WATER-COLOUR)



*(In the Drucker Collection,
Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam)*

PLATE LXXIII. THE ANGLER
(WATER-COLOUR)



(In the Drucker Collection, Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam)

PLATE LXXIV. THE SICK NEIGHBOUR

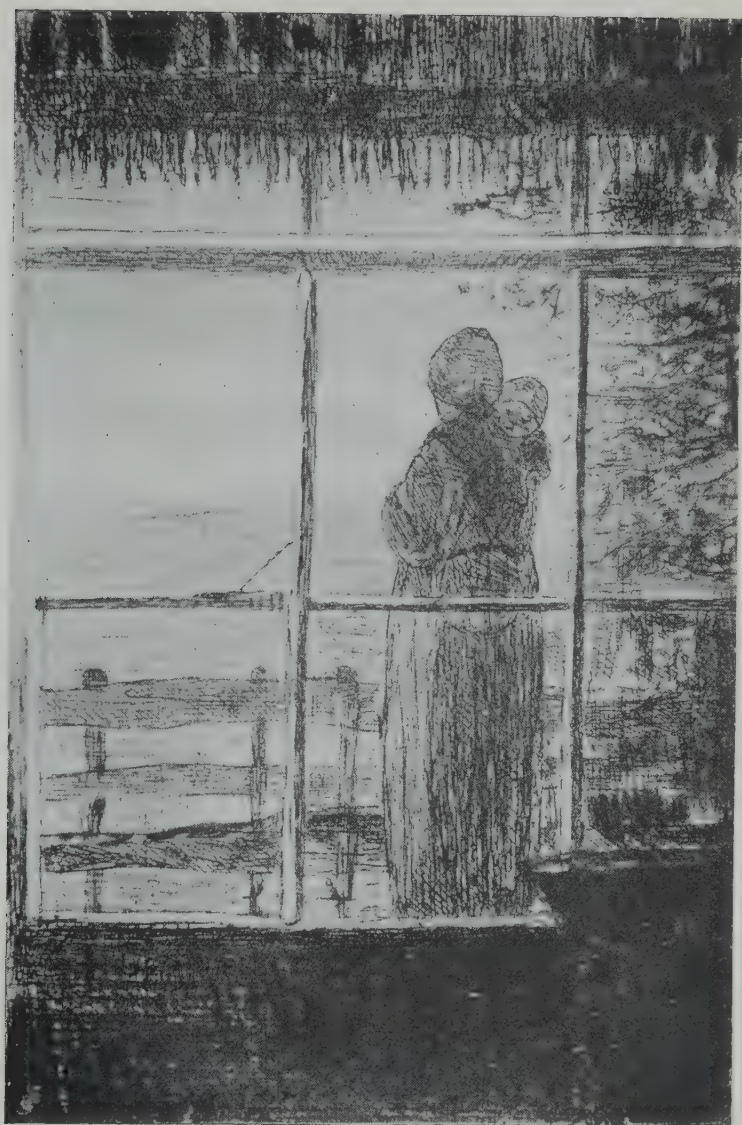


PLATE LXXV. WAITING (ETCHING)



PLATE LXXVI. CARPENTER LIGHTING HIS PIPE (ETCHING, 1880)



PLATE LXXVII. AN OLD MAN (ETCHING, 1898)

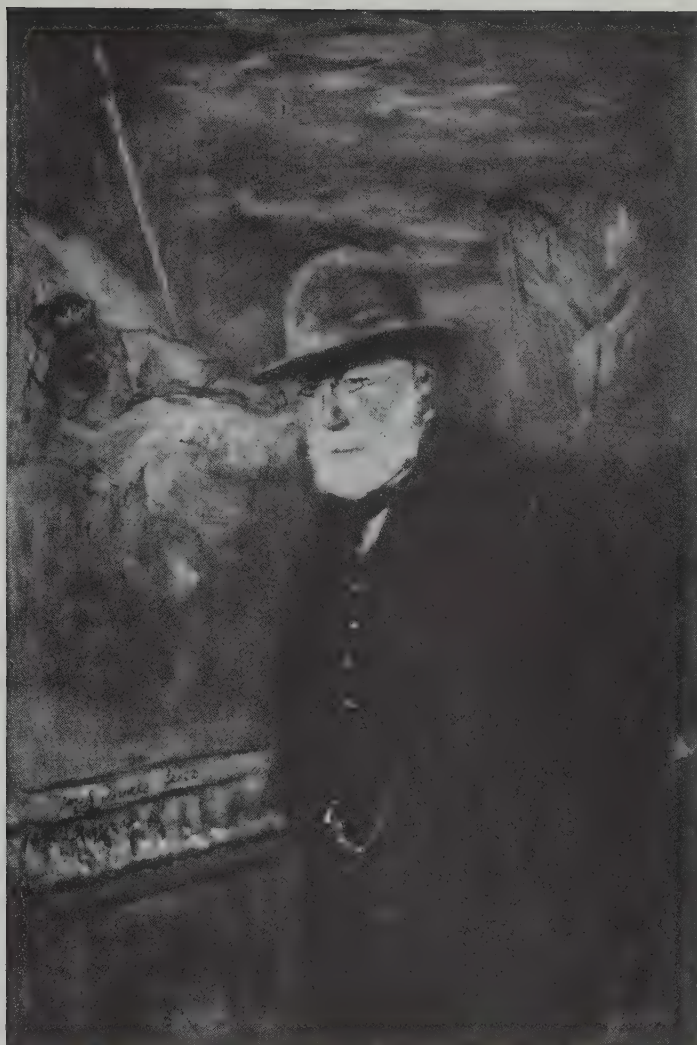


PLATE LXXVIII. SELF PORTRAIT WITH
"DAVID AND SAUL" IN THE BACKGROUND

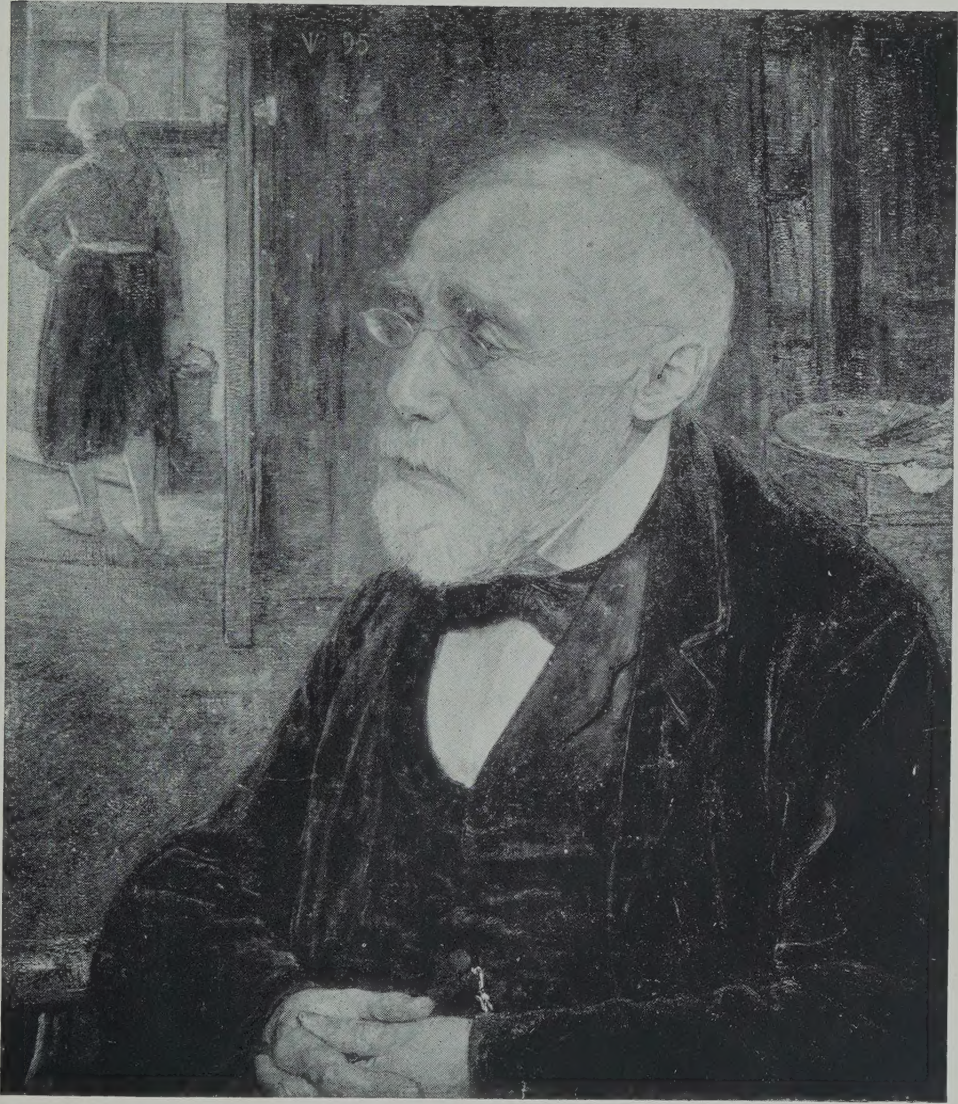


PLATE LXXIX. PORTRAIT OF JOSEF ISRAËLS, BY JAN VETH

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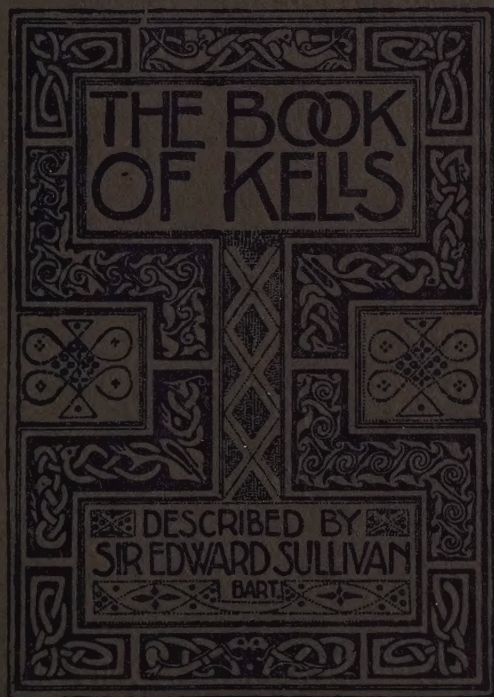
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